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# PRINCE CHARMING

A FANTASTIC EPISODE IN COURT DRESS

By "RITA"

*Author of "Peg the Rake," "Kitty the Rag," "Petticoat Loose,"  
"Souls," etc.*

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# PRINCE CHARMING

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## CHAPTER I

"I do believe I'm—growing—"

"Sir!" exclaimed the startled courtier.

"Stout," adæa Prince Charming, with a smile.

"Observe—an increasing width of chest, a gradual disappearance of waist. There is certainly a difference."

"Your Highness' appearance is certainly more-robust; but your figure is still symmetrical."

A whimsical smile touched the lips of the gracious personage who had been speaking.

"Your pills are always sugar-coated, Fritz," he said. "But I have one faithful friend who never lies, and it told me a few moments ago an unflattering, if wholesome, truth. Robust, I certainly am. With regard to symmetry—there is the benefit of more

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than a doubt. Shall I take to the bicycle, Fritz? Turkish baths and German Spas haven't worked a miracle yet."

"You should walk more, sir; and I have heard that rowing has remarkable virtues for reducing—"

"Corpulence! My good Fritz!"

"Oh! sir. That is entirely beside the mark. A little superfluous tissue, let us say."

"Fritz," said His Royal Highness gravely, "the truth is, I've lived too well, enjoyed life too much, had too much of my own way; loved too lightly, won too easily. The result is visible; plainly visible. All my tailor's art cannot effect concealment. I want a change of life, Fritz. A plunge into a deep sea of solitude, that will teach me to know myself. I want to be worried instead of pleased. To fast instead of feast. To have only my own limbs to carry me whither I would—not go. To work instead of idle. To suffer instead of enjoy. Then I might once more become slim, graceful, what you aptly and unsuitably termed—symmetrical. Is all this possible, my friend? If so, let it be arranged and I will give you half of my kingdom. It's not so large that I should miss it." And he laughed.

The courtier and counsellor looked searchingly at the fair smiling face and eminently handsome person

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that had won for their owner the fairy sobriquet of "Prince Charming."

A gay, good-humoured, laughing person he was. One who had taken life and its good things with quite commendable fortitude. Who had many virtues and fewer vices than his exalted position and temptations would have excused. He was thirty years of age, an heir apparent, and unmarried. That alliances had been proposed, advised, and almost arranged, goes without saying, but His Graciousness had been hard to please, and persistent in postponing what he termed the "evil day." Not on the plea of wild oats, or love of liberty, or indifference to the policy of the situation, but from an absolute disinclination to ask any of these fair, and gracious, and well-born ladies to share a prospective throne, and a dull court life, and a heart untouched by any stronger passion than resignation to the inevitable law that regulates Kings and Kingdoms. But this could not go on for ever. Could not go on for even a longer period than the ensuing year. An ultimatum had gone forth that his choice must be made at last, and a certain serene, and high-born, and beautiful, and well-dowered Princess had to be seriously considered and accepted.

The fiat of an august personage in the background had decided this. Patience has its limits, and royal

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birth its obligations. Prince Charming sighed, considered, sighed again, and took to contemplating the lady's picture, and his own figure.

The preceding conversation was the result of the last process.

"Fritz," he said at last. "I shall consult the Lady Agnes."

The Counsellor looked grave. He had no great liking for the Lady Agnes. She was the feminine counterpart of himself, so far as position went. In fact, she was the Prince's other counsellor, and their views and opinions often clashed. She was witty, charming, rich, and if not beautiful had so much to be grateful for in the way of art and a skilled maid, that her actual skin, hair, and teeth never cost her an anxious moment. When one possesses a graceful figure, exquisitely capable of enduring twenty inch corsets and every martyrdom of fashion, a ready tongue, unflagging spirits, and a frame incapable, apparently, of fatigue, one has much to be thankful for in this nineteenth century.

Lady Agnes and the Prince were great friends. He had come in a measure to depend on her advice and confide in her judgment.

Count Lieberwurst, otherwise Fritz, seriously disapproved of all this. He had suffered much by reason

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of the lady's keen wit and sharp tongue. He dreaded her rivalry. He disliked her ridicule of himself. When the Prince proposed taking his difficulties to her he scented danger. His heart was perturbed, but his brain was dull. He had nothing to suggest.

The Prince walked to and fro the room, occasionally glancing at the mirrors which reflected his figure.

"Yes," he said again. "I'll go to Lady Agnes. She'll find what I want."

"May I enquire what that is, sir?" asked the courtier deferentially.

"A place," answered the Prince, "where I shall be absolutely unknown. Where no luxuries of civilization can be procured, where air and exercise will be imperative, where I can live simply, healthily, naturally, in fact, as nature meant man to live—for the space of one month.

The counsellor gasped. He had come from the stiff etiquette, the invincible exactions and prerogatives of a petty German Court, and life to him was made up of cut and dry rules and regulations, and the word "Prince" was a weighty one, and bristling with importance.

"One month!" he repeated. "Your Highness would never be able to endure such a life even if you found

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such a place. But *that* I am sure you will never succeed in doing."

The Prince laughed. "*Par grace de Dieu*—and Agnes," he said. "Have you ever remarked, my good Fritz, that the lady disappears periodically and entirely from the knowledge of her friends. No one knows where she goes, or what she does. She returns fresh, vigorous, younger than ever (and yet I can give her points in the matter of years.) When questioned she says demurely that she has been 'in retreat.' Well, I shall follow her example. I too will discover a retreat, and if it proves as beneficial to my figure as to her's, it will be time well spent."

"But, sir—"

"If you can find me such a place I shall be eternally grateful," continued the Prince. "But I am quite sure you cannot. You are acquainted with every fashionable Spa, Bâd, or Cure, but of anything primitive, healthy, natural, you are as ignorant, my good Fritz, as I myself! So I will e'en go to Lady Agnes, as I said before. Order my cab. I shall lunch with her."

He waved his hand in dismissal, and with a low bow the Counsellor left the room.

The Prince continued his promenade. That whimsical smile played hide-and-seek with his tawny sweeping moustache, but his eyes looked grave.

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"A man," he said softly, "To be a man as other men, unhampered, unintruded upon, free! Heavens! What a heavy price one pays for a crown and a heritage after all!"

The gong had just sounded for luncheon in a charming maisonette in the suburb of Mayfair, when a cab drove up to the door. A lady sitting by the drawing-room window looked over the flower-decked balcony, and smiled.

"The Prince again," she said.

The other occupant of the room jumped hastily up and her book fell to the floor.

"Good gracious, and I'm so untidy, Agnes; have I time to——"

The door opened to a footman's obsequious announcement, and a graceful curtsy and an embarrassed one greeted the person announced.

He shook hands cordially. "I have come to ask your hospitality again," he said.

"You are heartily welcome, sir," said Lady Agnes, "and luncheon is ready, if I am to have the honour?"

He bowed. "The honours are divided," he said, and offered his arm

The chaperon followed. She was a widowed relative, well-born and poor, and her lines had fallen



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in very unpleasant places until Lady Agnes Bellevue orphaned, and heiress of the Earl of Fairacres offered her a home. She was kind-hearted and inoffensive, and proved a useful and non-assertive chaperon. She was however quite unable to accustom herself to the presence of royalty, and suffered agonies of nervousness at the various luncheons, dinners, and teas which the Prince Charming delighted to honour. •

He was unaware of the effect of his presence. In fact he rarely troubled himself to remember her existence.

The conversation during luncheon was somewhat formal owing to the presence of the servants.

Lady Agnes even distrusted French when important subjects were under discussion. Higher education of the masses had proved disadvantageous to the minor importance of the select circles of Little Britain.

Coffee and cigarettes at last claimed exemption, from household surveillance, and Mrs. Chauncey having withdrawn, the Prince began to unfold his scheme for the preservation of royal dignity, and to ask advice on the subject of a primitive Arcadia.

The blue arch eyes of the lady expressed more than surprise.

"Except in the pages of modern romance," she said, "I never heard of such a place. And there

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are few things more difficult now-a-days than to preserve an *incognito*. You may set out with it, but the spies of the Press are on your heels and the scouts of the great world before you, and the whole progress is very much like the performance of a pursued ostrich!

"I had thought," said the Prince, "that some such place existed, and that *you*, Agnes, might be acquainted with it. As for the *incognito*, I shall give out that I have gone to—Bavaria, and Harold will be there instead. He is quite like enough to pass for me. Especially—"

He paused. Their eyes met. His were very significant. She coloured, with a skill born of accident and the handiwork of the dressing-room.

"If I am there, your Highness means?"

"Exactly. It is asking a great deal I am aware, and Harold is somewhat of a bore, but—"

"I have not found him so," she said.

The Prince looked at her curiously. But her eyes were on the cigarette from which her slender white fingers were flicking the ash.

"You are a wonderful woman, Agnes," he said. "You contrive to get amusement out of everything. I can't imagine how you do it."

"Because I take things and people as they

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are, and have a good digestion and a sufficient income."

"And no heart?"

"Ah! sir, that is unkind. It is only an undeveloped germ as yet."

"But a germ is sometimes important. What do you do when people bore you, Agnes?"

"Get away from them," she answered promptly.

"Ah! if I only could."

"It should not be difficult—occasionally."

"I want to try. Tell me the place, Agnes?"

"What place, sir?"

"Your retreat," he said meaningly. "It has been a carefully preserved secret so far. I promise I will betray it to no one else."

"Your Highness could scarcely go into a convent," she said demurely.

He raised his well-marked, even brows.

"Convents occasionally accept guests, do they not?"

"Not in Erinia. At least I do not know of one."

"Erinia," he repeated. "Do you mean to say you go to—Erinia?"

"It is a humiliating confession," she said, "but I do. I think Your Highness scarcely knows it except by name. Yet you have great interests there—

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Powers, a fair dominion, and some very loyal subjects. I have discovered that."

"Erinia," he repeated again. "Who would have thought it! Tell me what is it like, and what sort of people?"

"It is very beautiful," she answered. "Green, lovely, fertile. The scenery is as yet unharmed—I mean undeveloped. Railways have left a great portion of the country undisturbed. The lakes and rivers are less known to paddle-wheels than to fishermen. There is gold, but no mining. Coal, but no collieries. Sea-side resorts, but no piers. Cars, but no carriages. Fields, but few farmers. Properties and estates, but no landlords. Schools and colleges, but little education. Plenty to do, but little inclination to do it. Superstitions, but not faith; laws, but no law-makers. In short, it is a country of contradictions, and he who would rule it needs a man's head, a woman's heart, and a child's guilelessness."

The Prince laid down his cigarette, and looked attentively at the face, flushed now with quite an unusual earnestness.

"You are telling me this with a purpose?" he said. She half smiled.

"I am Your Highness's most loyal and obedient servant," she said. "If I have taken a peep into

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futurity it is only on your behalf. And if Your Highness has a mind to masquerade, there is no place where you are so absolutely unknown, and so little liable to discovery, as this remote spot of your dominions."

The Prince knit his brows, and preserved a thoughtful silence for some moments.

"True," he said at last, "I have never been there. No one would dream I had gone, either. But there are many towns; vast tracts of country. It is hard to make a choice. And the language is somewhat strange, is it not?"

"It has some points of resemblance to our own," said Lady Agnes. "I think you would understand it, after a little time. You have some acquaintance with the Celto-Gallic dialect, have you not?"

"That," he said, "is Her Majesty's privilege and pride. I cannot boast of great acquirements in the matter."

"Our language is spoken in Erinia," said Lady Agnes. "Only at first, it is somewhat difficult to understand, because no one drops an 'h,' or a 'g,' or puts in an 'r.' But Your Highness would have no trouble, I am sure."

"And how am I to get to this place?" he asked. "I mean—where that convent is?"

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"But that is an island, sir. A small, insignificant place, only inhabited by fisher-folk, who make a scanty enough living. It is true—"

She paused so abruptly that his attention was arrested.

"You may go on," he said.

"I was about to say that there is someone on this island who calls himself a king. But he is really little better than the fishermen themselves. In fact, I looked upon him as a sort of harmless madman."

"Agnes," said the Prince, reproachfully, "you have been acquainted with all these mysteries and wonders, this primitive kingdom set up in my dominions, and have kept it a secret. I am not sure that you are not guilty of treason."

She laughed lightly.

"If Your Highness should say, 'Off with her head,' I'm not sure that it would concern me very much."

"It is too pretty a head," he said. "I shall pardon it in consideration that its owner draws me a plan of my route, and adds to it a few rules for my guidance. Also furnishes me with an introduction to that convent."

Again that flush rose, and burnt like a warm flame in the fair cheek of his hostess.

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"Why is it, sir," she asked, "that you are so bent upon going to that special place?"

"Might it not be on account of—associations with yourself, fair lady?"

"It might," she said. "But I do not think it is."

"You have proved it has restorative, not to say—rejuvenating powers."

"Any place where one can rest undisturbed and enjoy perfect freedom, possesses those powers."

"Does it? Well, I have not found such a place yet. You will write me those directions, Agnes?"

"Am I not Your Highness's most obedient subject?"

"And counsellor, and friend?" he added.

"So you are good enough to say."

"A prince has not so many as the mere man. I have a fancy to go seek them on my own merits."

"I hardly think you will find them in—Erinia," she said.

## CHAPTER II

THE "divine rights" of Kings and Princes are words potential, and occasionally of unlimited meaning.

"I would" is oftentimes translated into "I will," by the whim of a moment, or the caprice of a sentiment. So it happened that Prince Charming, fired by hope of adventure, and roused from apathy to interest, disappeared in company with a Gladstone bag and a tourist suit, one August morning:

Court officials gave discreet hints, and various kitchen wenches or liveried menials, who figured as

Our Court Correspondent" to fashionable journals, informed the interested inhabitants of Suburbia, that a certain Royal personage was travelling incog. as the Count Christian, and had gone to a remote part of the Bavarian Alps in quest of certain springs, etc., etc. All of which delighted Suburbia immensely, and was treated with disrespectful indifference by smart Belgravians at Cowes, or Homburg.



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There are few things so useful and, at times so inconvenient to personages in high positions as the possession of a double. Prince Charming was fortunate enough to own a counterfeit presentment of his august self in a cousin of Teutonic extraction and British nationality. Save for a slight difference in figure, an eye more gray than blue, the two men were like enough to deceive even their own relatives. To his double, who was also his trusty friend and best loved comrade, the Prince confided his scheme.

Frederick William Alexander Harold, usually known as Prince Harold, was a Serene Highness, the son of a Grand Duke, and a Princess, allied to many notable High-Mightinesses. For all that he was a very simple, kindly-hearted, inoffensive young man with a great admiration for everything British, civil, political, and military. For his cousin he had an affection born of long acquaintance, boyish escapades, and mutual misunderstandings. His own virtues were less solid, his peccadilloes had been more daring, and he took life flippantly, not to say irreverently, in a manner that had occasioned serious misconceptions on the part of his own Court, or that of Little Britain.

When Prince Charming confided to him that his waist-measurement was affording grave concern and sleepless nights, he advised a prize fighter instead of a

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physician, and even hinted at training for a steeplechase as though his cousin was quite an ordinary individual. The Prince shook his head. "No, Harold," he said, "there's not time. I shall go for a walking tour through part of my dominions where I am quite unknown."

"Alone?" enquired his cousin.

"Quite alone, and unarmed," answered the Prince courageously.

"Isn't that a—risk? especially when you are unacquainted with the dominions?"

"Maybe. But I have been told a legend of the country which gives me confidence. It relates how a maiden young and beautiful, decked only with choicest jewels and supported by a snow-white wand, wandered from one end of the Island to the other, quite unprotected, quite alone, quite defenceless. Surely what a simple girl could do, a man—even a Prince—might venture."

"Certainly," agreed Harold, "there might even be less—risk—in case of the latter. Do you propose to walk the island from one end to the other? How tired you will be!"

"But I shall get *thin*," urged his cousin, "and then I can submit my photograph for the inspection and approval of Princess Stéphanie. You know I have almost consented to that alliance?"

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"Yes, you hinted as much. The olive after the sweets, eh?"

"Olives," said the Prince sententiously—"are an acquired taste. I may acquire this one—in time."

"And a walking tour is to bring about an appetite? I see. Are there any more jewelled, or unjewelled and beauteous maidens 'doing' the Island just at present?"

"Harold, I am serious. And this is not a subject for jest. Not only am I seeking health and—and—"

"Personal reduction?" suggested Prince Harold.

"That will serve. But I also wish to make myself acquainted with this country and its inhabitants."

"There are plenty of books written about it, at least I've heard so."

"Yes. But I've never read one. I can master foreign languages easily enough, but 'Erinian' as she is wrote, presents too many difficulties for an untutored tongue."

"What will you do when you are in the country then?"

"I must trust to my ear, and—adaptibility"

"You might engage an instructress, if some of those wandering maidens come your way."

"Harold," said the Prince sternly. "I repeat do

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not jest. I am going purely in a spirit of morality, and—and interest.”

“Self-interest,” murmured Harold.

The Prince ignored the inuendo.

“And when I return,” he continued. “I shall be in a position and disposition to contemplate matrimony.”

“I see you expect great results. The Erinians are doubtless—primitive.”

Prince Charming tried to look stern. If he did not succeed, the intention was only marred by a twinkle in the blue of an eye met by the humorous challenge of an opposing gray one.

“Won’t you have a cigarette?” he said.

That same night he was on his way to Erinia.

The sun was shining over the sparkling waters of a beautiful bay.

Among a host of check-suited tourists, loud-voiced Americans and other incongruities, a solitary figure paced the steamer’s deck, with eyes fixed on the charming picture Nature had painted for her own gracious pleasure, and love of what was already lovely.

“So *that*,” he murmured half aloud, “is Erinia.”

“Begorra thin, man, an’ is it a forayner ye are!

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Sure it's no sich thing, but plain Dublin Bay, an' me own native land, an' joy it is to me own two eyes this same blessed day to be sayin' it agin. Ah! Holy Saint Pathrick 'twas a poor enough man I was the day I left it, an' not all me dollars has been able to wipe out the misery av that memory. Broke entirely me heart was, I thought. But that's ten years or more, an' sure that same heart hasn't forgotten, nor me tongue either, an, 'tis the old love, an' the old wurrds, an' the old swate Bay, an' what haythin would presume to be callin' it any forrin-sounding title such as ye were afther givin' it? Let me hear him, that's all, an' as sure as me name's Pathrick O'Farrel, an' me fayther's before me, I'll not lave the plantin' av two Irish fists in his face to any other patriot but me own self!"

The tweed-suited tourist had listened to this bræathless unpunctuated harangue with unmitigated astonishment. At its conclusion he drew from his pocket a small note-book.

"Would you be kind enough, sir," he then said, very slowly, "To repeat that speech again. I could not quite follow you."

"Ah! thin, is that so?" said Mr. O'Farrel ironically, "An' it's a Sassenach, not a forrin'er ye are by spache? Well, glory be, I'd niver ha' thought it. More

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Shame to ye for not knowing the proper geographical terminology av the most beautiful country in all the four quarters av the globe, bar none as they say in Ameriky. An' don't ye be callin' it anything else bat what it is, an what Saint Pathrick himself christened it. What's that yer doing?"

The traveller started.

"I was only making a note of your valuable information," he said, in the same slow distinct manner. His accent was strange enough to further the Erinian's belief that he was conversing with that unimportant being—a foreigner.

"Makin' notes. Is that yer bizness thin? A mighty fine iday to be takin' the wurrds out av an honest patriot's mouth an' sendin' thim to the papers as truth, an' printin' thim as lies. Is it speshul correspondent to the newspapers ye are, me good man? Bekase av that's the case yer not wanted in this country, an' the sooner yer out av it the better."

Prince Charming told himself he was hearing some plain truths for the first time in his life. The advantages of appearing in a strange country as a plain unadulterated, man seemed to have compensations.

He put away his note-book and surveyed the fiery face and hair to match, with unqualified surprise. "I have nothing to do with the newspapers," he said.

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"And isn't it rather premature to order a person out of a country before he is in it?"

"I'd have iver<sup>er</sup> man-jack out av *my* country that wasn't born an' bred in it," answered the fire-eater.

"Is that what you meant by saying you were patriot?" asked the Prince innocently.

"Sure an' that's what I am, an' have iver<sup>er</sup> been, an' always will be, an' it's not much I'm lóving thim as druv me out of me own land"—(he should have said bog). "An' me own home"—(he should have said cabin). "An' sint me across says an' oceans to dwell among strangers—(he forgot to mention the dollars gained by such expatriation), an' work by the sweat av me brow, an' be trated like a dog, an' sworn to kape the pace once a month at laste, an' a taste av prison for iver<sup>er</sup> drop av whiskey that wet me lips to loosen me tongue. That's my stor<sup>y</sup>, sor. Take it for what you like."

"It's very—interesting," said the Prince, gravely. "And so you are really a patriot? I'm glad to have met one. Are there many like you in Er—, I beg your pardon, in this country we're coming to?"

"Millions," answered the patriot, solemnly. "You'll find thim in iver<sup>er</sup> city, in iver<sup>er</sup> town, in iver<sup>er</sup> mansion, an' in iver<sup>er</sup> cabin. Be the bones av Saint Pathrick, av I thought there wasn't, I should

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consider that me own honour was impayched, an' demand instant satisfaction!"

He looked so turbulent and valorous, that the Prince felt that honour must be a very important matter among Erinians. But he only answered, "Quite so," being really intent upon gaining as much information as possible, respecting this wonderful country.

"You see," he murmured, apologetically, "I have never been here before."

"Indade. Well, I don't suppose inyone in the country has remarked it," said Mr. O'Farrell politely. "But, as yer on yer travels, may I ask what's yer bizness here at all, now ye are come?"

"Business," faltered the Prince. "Oh! none. I'm merely going to have a look round."

"An' sure, that's very kind av yez," said the patriot, with fine irony. "An' much the better we'll all be for it. Ye'll be goin' to Crooknamanagooran?"

"To—where?" faltered the Prince, with an involuntary motion of his hand to the note-book pocket.

The patriot repeated the name. "It's where the King lives, whin he's at home," he added.

"The King—but I thought—"

"Begorra thin, don't I know what ye thought?"



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But it's not so at all. We've a King sure enough, an' he's a throne av his own, an' a royal pallus, and maybe he'll have two. It's that I've come over to arrange about. Ye see, it's this way—"

But what way it was the traveller was not destined to hear just then, for the boat had arrived at the landing pier, and the patriot went to look after his luggage.

They parted without the courtesy of a farewell, but the Prince felt that he had at last reached a country whose inhabitants might be counted upon to bestow surprising information, and quite unhistorical facts.

In the train that bore him southwards he meditated upon the patriot's words. Of course he did not quite credit them. He felt sure that if a real King ruled or abode in Erinia, he would have heard of it. He knew that the country was represented since the Act of Union by a restricted number of its aristocracy named Imperial Peers. These personages would certainly never have withheld such an important fact from the Ruling Government. He suspected that the patriot was either a lunatic, or had been trying to get what is vulgarly termed, "a rise" out of him.

But though of a trustful disposition Prince Charming was not credulous. He took out his note-book,

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and in the privacy of a first-class smoking carriage entered the extravagant name of the supposed monarch's domicile. He spelt it phonetically. It might have passed for an Egyptian or Otaheitean word—in print, or in a Royal diary. Having done this, he set himself to study a few of the Lady Agnes' directions, also her glossary of terms and words most in use among the natives of Erinia.

To his delight he found that he already recognised some words by reason of that remarkable conversation with the Patriot.

"Begorra!"                      *A general exclamation,  
signifying anything*

"Sassenach."                      *An Englishman.*

"St. Patrick."                      *Patron Saint.*

"Trated."                      *Treated.*

"Kape. Plaze."                      *Keep. Please.*

(In most cases, wrote Lady Agnes, "e" is pronounced as "a").

"Yez."                      *Ye or you.*

"Comither."                      *Literally "come hither." An  
allusion to the burden of an  
old love-charm, pronounced  
Comether.*

"Wake."                      *The ceremony of sitting up  
with the dead, and chanting  
mournful songs or laments in  
their honour, (to the accom-  
paniment of glasses of whiskey.)*

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The Prince skipped the rest of the vocabulary, and turned to "Useful Hints as to manners and customs."

I. Never refuse to treat (trayte) any inhabitant if he asks you. It leads to personal remarks, and consequent unfriendliness.

II. Always listen to the history and pedigree of an Erinian. It is usually worth hearing, and not advisable to arrest until it reaches the history or exploits of the fourteenth generation. Then—a gentle hint as to the subject starting the conversation or enquiry may be given. Sooner than this it is apt to create unpleasantness.

III. Never interfere in a quarrel. The belligerents contrive to do a good deal of damage to each other, but it is comparatively harmless to what they would deem themselves bound to inflict on a peace-maker.

IV. If stress of weather or fatigue compel you to take a vehicle, and the driver states he will leave his fare to you, carefully calculate its widest possibility, and—double it. Much precious time and argument may be saved by this means. But it is not *always* reliable. If you are in a hurry, give as much again.

V. Never reply with simple "Yes" or "No," to any question. Such reticence is looked upon as a

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personal insult. Above all, never expect to receive such a useless response while there are twelve hours in a working day.

VI. Never dispute a miracle, however authentic.

VII. Never deride a superstition. The fate of kingdoms is as nothing against the importance of a flight of magpies. A ladder, a funeral, and a dream, are also of abnormal significance to Erinians.

Here the Prince closed the book. "I suppose I shall understand those things better when I have gone about the country a little," he sighed. "I wonder when I shall reach that Island?"

## CHAPTER III

HAVING started with the intention of a walking tour through the country, the Prince deemed it advisable to use trains whenever he found them convenient.

A judicious study of the map of Erinia had led to this alteration of plans.

He had not thought it worth while to make any stay in the Capital. To judge of a people by the few isolated specimens sent to its chief town or towns was, he felt assured, a grave mistake. Who could suppose that London was characteristic of England, Paris of France, Berlin of Germany?

The most important and interesting features of an Empire are contained in its peasantry and its workers. General character, nature, and disposition are not adequately represented by any aristocracy. They simply introduce the foreign element added or implanted by the exigencies of marriage and commerce.

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Prejudice plays largely against the due understanding of the hearts, sympathies, and feelings of a people. In no country had it played such havoc as in the limited comprehension displayed by Little Britain towards all that appertained to its conquered dependency of Erinia.

Statesmen had misruled it. Politicians had harangued of it. Writers had ridiculed—and travellers had maligned it. From the time of its conquest Erinia had represented something ridiculous and unimportant. Its language was pronounced a judicious mixture of *brogue* and blunder. Its inhabitants were supposed to be a type of the common or garden fool. In dramas, and in comic literature, an Erinian was more or less a gross caricature of all he knew himself to be. On the stage his presentment was as much bound to raise a laugh as the proverbial wax-moustached, smirking Gaul. For folly, uselessness, effrontery, and insubordination, he was conceived to have no equal. Governments had done their best to quench his national ardour, and his national thirst; to break his spirit, destroy his patriotism, set bounds to his riotous good temper, and restrict his natural inclination towards untruthfulness.

They had not succeeded in any one of these laudable endeavours.

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As he had been in the times of savage chiefs and fierce blood-thirsty rulers, so the Erinian remained at heart. A thin veneer of polish and policy covered the slumbering savagery and the generous recklessness of ancient days, but the real man still lay beneath. He would not be coerced, he would not be ruled, he would not be bound with red tape, or soothed by soft-sounding speech. A silken rein might have led him, but at bit and curb he grew restive. For those he loved and honoured, his heart's blood would have been gladly shed. For those he hated and rebelled against, their own life-tribute was as stubbornly demanded.

After years of warfare and struggle, rebellion and defeat, he had suddenly given in to what he recognised as inevitable. Then he had been left severely alone. So much so, that at times a dim wonder rose in his brain as to what, or by whom his freedom was bound? By whom was he ruled, and of what puppet court was he the string? He had heard of a Queen, but had never seen her. Of Princes and Princesses—they never troubled him. Royal marriages, births, and deaths, left him none the poorer for expenditure in flags and fireworks, though his proud spirit rebelled against taxation. To avoid *that*, and in a spirit of laudable enterprise, he occasionally made use of free

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transport to a great and wonderful land where freedom spread its wings, and every man was the equal of every other man. Where commerce meant only honest competition, not prolific monopoly. Where work was not compulsory, where dollars were alone counted as the supreme good. Where art and literature were only recognized as valuable by what they cost to import, or annex. Where no foolish titles and dignities lent to man a false importance. Where only dollared heiresses were permitted to offer themselves in exchange for such comparative trifles as Royal, or Ducal Consorts, who were brought over on exhibition, and divorced when the novelty of possession had worn off.

From this wonderful country the Erinian would return at intervals; sometimes sadder, sometimes wiser; occasionally a richer man. By that time he had learned some useful lessons. Among them that there might be a worse thing in the world than a Limited Liability Co., ~~Controlled by Queens and Kings.~~ Then he would remember that he possessed a Government and grow proud, ~~and self-important, and curious.~~ His imagined grievance sank into insignificance. He held up his head so high that even the Bird of Freedom might have found it worth pecking at.

He was a small part of a great Empire. True, but



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size is only comparative. A brick has its place in the building of a wall. Every plate and screw has its number and position, ere the steamship or the engine can fulfil their destiny. The Erinian preened himself and spoke words of wisdom. He found listeners. He was of new importance now, by reason of travels and seeing the world beyond the little Island where for centuries his people had dwelt, and ruled, and fought, and submitted.

Gradually, a new wave of discontent rose and rolled its strong swift way throughout the land. It was a wave just about to burst when Prince Charming set foot on the Island. Strange to say, its force of motion lay in the newly-recognized fact that so far as personal experience went the Erinians had *not* a Queen.

"Who had seen her?" they asked each other, and the answer was generally a shake of the head, or a derisive laugh.

Yet, once an extremely ancient person appeared with a legend of a Royal visit; of a maiden, spiritual, delicate, with soft wondering eyes, a robe of ermine, a glittering crown on her fair head, who had paid a visit to Erinia in far-off days, and expressed herself delighted with the beauty of the country, and the hospitality of its inhabitants.

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This octogenarian became immediately a person of importance. For the remainder of his days he was ordered to do no work, to sit in a cushioned chair by the open hearth, to be treated to as much of the national 'tipple' as he could consume, and to daily relate to an admiring audience this famous legend.

By dint of oft-repeating, also of an ineradicable Erinian habit of romancing with the simple truth, the legend grew curiously unlike the original facts. In course of a year or two the historian became somewhat mixed as to dates and details. He was of an age when sedentary habits and copious libations are apt to confuse, instead of stimulate the intellect.

In one of those moods of confusion he placed *himself* in the position of the Royal Personage, whose appearance and actions he was describing. In spite of persevering efforts on the part of the listeners, and strenuous endeavours on his own, he never struggled back to lucidity. He believed himself to be King, and found infinite and inexhaustible delight in dwelling upon the incidents of his rule, the wisdom of his laws, and his numerous Royal Prerogatives.

His loyal circle of auditors grew at first tolerant, then impatient, then annoyed.

When there seemed no probability of his ever again

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disassociating himself from the original legend, and every likelihood of his patriarchal existence extending to a centenary, they gently but forcibly removed him to an adjacent island, and left him in charge of a young granddaughter, and an ancient female relative.

Here he lived and ruled in imagination, as happy and much safer than many a real monarch whose crown of thorns and sceptre of straw make him the sport of Fate, and his own people.

. . . . .

"*Himmel!* I have been asleep," murmured the Prince suddenly, as a jerk of the train nearly threw him off his seat. "Asleep, and what a strange dream I have had! But I have arrived, I do believe. It is here Agnes bade me get out to seek my hotel. Yes; I cannot pronounce the name, but that is it printed before me. And now for adventures!"

## CHAPTER IV

THE prose of an Hotel (which in a less civilised country than Erinia would have been termed an Inn) introduced to the Prince some novelties in the way of comfort and inconvenience.

He engaged a bedroom, and the modest appearance of his luggage and himself labelled him in the eyes of proprietor and waiters and chambermaids as "one av thim tourist chaps, and not much at that."

In the way of luxuries and conveniences his apartment left much to be desired, but a gentle remonstrance was answered by: "Sure, an' isn't there a bed, an' a chair, an' a glass for ye to shave by, an' what more in the name av goodness wud ye be wantin'?"

He was silenced, remembering that a tweed suit and a Gladstone bag possess obligations as well as

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proverbial nobility. He washed off the dust of his journey in a basin measuring some six inches by four, and then descended to the coffee-room.

It was full of a talkative and demonstrative assembly, all of the male sex. He devoutly hoped there were no more patriots among them.

A waiter assigned him a table set in the wide bay of the window. It overlooked the mouth of a river, rose-flushed now by sunset, and held in the protecting embrace of a lofty chain of mountains. So peaceful, so harmonious, so softly sweet with rest, and shade, and shelter, was the spot, that for a moment he stood gazing, and drinking in its beauty, regardless of a hint from the attendant as to "orders."

"Will yer honour be afther sayin' what ye'll take for yer dinner?" repeated the official, for the third time.

The Prince started, and brought his dreamy, blue eyes to the level of a freckled face, sandy hair, and wide, smiling mouth.

"Dinner," he said. "Oh, of course, I was forgetting."

The smile widened.

"Indade thin, it's not often that gintry av yer sort are forgettin' their stomachs," he said. "But as

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there's others waitin' that's not so unmindful, perhaps yer honour will lave it to me to bring what's goin' round?"

"Certainly," said the Prince. "Certainly. It's sure to be good."

"Well, there's plenty av it," said the man, and retired.

"How could Agnes have said these people were difficult to understand," thought the Prince, as he took the chair placed for him. "I find it quite easy to make out what they say."

He turned from the view to the room, and the long table, crowded now by hungry feeders, who gave no reason to suppose that any of them had forgotten to bring appetites with them. But though they ate, they talked. Unceasingly, noisily, enthusiastically, they talked.

He caught fragments of speech, expressions, suggestions, which seemed capable of arousing the most boisterous mirth, but his recently avowed comprehension of the language, failed to help him in this instance. It might have been the rapidity of utterance, or the quick retorts, or the catching up of unfinished sentences that puzzled him, but whatever it was, he had to confess that the whole conversation only spread itself before him as a multi-

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coloured patch-work, from which he gathered the astounding facts, that "Phelim McQuade's gran'father, had purchased a pig of Larry O'Neil, farmer in the next parish, which said pig was to be paid for by a certain sum of ready money, a barrel of meal, and a—(incomprehensible) something of 'purtaties.' In course of explanation however, Phelim and the pig became mixed up with a certain Widdy Doran, who had a daughter Mary. After a little more discussion, a dowry was introduced; also a young man by name of "Limping Bob." From this point matters showed a close resemblance to that inspiring nursery rhyme of "The House that Jack built." The *dramatis personae* were represented by the Pig, Phelim, Purtaties, the Widdy, Mary, and "Limping Bob."

The whole of these personages, their relatives and friends (specially and separately introduced) then seemed to have engaged in a sort of Faction Fight. This agreeable warfare appeared to break out periodically at such hilarious seasons as Wakes, Fairs, and Funerals. The conversation now became less of the nature of a chorus in Oratorio. It was continued in duct form by two stout weather-beaten gentlemen, and to the listener it ran something in this style.

*Bass.*—"With a whoo, and hurroo, and huzza,"

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says Tim, and whack went his stick. 'We'll finish it once for all,' he sez, 'and by the mother that bore ye, take back yer dirty wurrds,' he sez, 'or they'll be the last yer afther spakin' in this wurld, and take that,' he sez, 'and that;' and faith that whack wud have split a stronger skull than poor Tim's!"

*Baritone.* "'Twas Tim got the best av it."

*Bass.* "Divil a bit. I was there meself and saw it wid me own two eyes."

*Baritone.* "Thin I'm 'thinkin' those same two eyes av yer's were seein' double, Tom Brady, for wasn't I on the car drawn up jist outside the public where the row took place, an' jist watchin' the bit of divarsion, an' 'twas Paddy Dolan settled it with his own two fists, an' the blows like hail. Faith 'twas a grand sight entirely, an' worth goin' a mile in windy weather to see."

*Bass and Baritone (together).* "Paddy—fine, whacks, cracks. . . . Sowl to perdition! . . . Hell's curse to ye! . . . Ah! begorra thin . . . Thafe av the wurld . . . Caubeen . . . Murdher! . . . etc., etc."——

The new tourist started.

"Roast mutton, sir? Sure it's dramin' ye are agin. I've been all but joggin' yer elbow these two minnits or more."



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"A truly wonderful people," he murmured. "Wonderful. *Himmel!* What an argument. It made me quite warm to listen to it."

"Purtaties, sor?"

"Whacks—widows I mean."

"Sure an' is it demented ye are, sör—widdy's? We don't be sarvin' thim at tabley-d'hottys in *this* country whatever they do in your own."

The Prince drew a nerveless hand across a bewildered brow.

"I meant potatoes, of course. A strange country indeed!"

. . . . .  
He dined off roast mutton and potatoes. *Entrées* savouries, and sweets were represented in a general form, and in one course. They meant simply bread and cheese.

— Yet the Prince enjoyed his frugal meal with a zest unknown at flower-decked tables, and from menus of a dozen courses. He drank a little whisky and water by advice of the genial waiter who assured him that claret was but sour cold stuff, and poor comfort for the stomach; not to be compared with a "dhrop av the raal thing." So he ordered the "raal thing," and after partaking of it felt at peace and good-will with all mankind.

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By that time the noisy party had adjourned, apparently to the bar.

He wandered out, and found a path to the river side, and followed it on for the space of half a mile or so, when he found himself free of the town and standing on a wide shingly beach. Before him like a silver sheet, bright under the full moon rays, spread the majestic expanse of the Atlantic.

In a loneliness disturbed by no sound save that of chance sea-birds, the Prince stood and fed his sated eyes and senses with pure unadulterated nature. He seated himself on a jutting fragment of rock, and gave himself up to the charm of the hour and scene.

Baby ripples played at his feet. The vast sapphire arch of sky above was studded by countless stars. Here and there the sail or shape of a fishing boat was transmuted by moonlight's alchemy into something weird, and mystical, and fairy-like.

To the left lay the coast and the purple shadowy mountains, and in the distance, facing him, rising in fantastic shape from amidst the blue waters and seeming to lean and stretch towards the blue sky was an island.

The Island.

He recognised it at once from the Lady Agnes' description, and hastily sketched plans. It rose from

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the bosom of the waters, distinct yet formless. A substance within shadow. Vague, tantalizing, as were his own thoughts.

"To-morrow I shall be there," he said to himself, and then a strangely odd feeling swept over him. For he felt as if he were not *himself*, not the individuality he had known and imagined *himself* to be for a full quarter of a century, but someone entirely different.

Why was he here at all? What was he doing? What did he intend?

Vaguely and foolishly he put these questions, and as he put them seemed to stand *out* of, and apart from that solitary figure on the rock, as if he were its judge and accuser.

"Thyself shall thy own soul and self condemn," whispered some forgotten voice. He had read or heard it somewhere. Why did he think of it now? Was Life after all a thing of deeper import and deeper meaning than his extravagant and purposeless existence held? Had he a lesson to learn, a duty to fulfil, a command to obey?

Thoughts rushed to his brain like prisoners liberated from dark and secret dungeons. He covered his eyes with his hands, and shut out the spell of the rolling waters, and the mystic silver light.

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Then, breaking suddenly upon that darkness and the solemn silence around, came floating to his ears a voice.

From the sea it came, rising and falling in throbbing-passionate cadence over the width of waters. No lark at heaven's gate, no nightingale in summer nights, no songstress trained and reared in the world's famous cities beyond; had ever, so it seemed to him, possessed a voice so entrancing, so exquisite; so sadly sweet with pathos and with pain.

His hands fell. He lifted his face to the moonlight, and with all his soul hushed, and trembling, and expectant, listened to the mournful strains.

He could see only the distant fishing boats and the wheeling gulls. The song seemed to rise from out the swelling breast of the quiet sea. No human thing was in sight.

When the last notes died away—plaintive, mournful as a dying swan's lament—the tears within his eyes shut out all else for one strained passionate moment.

"Are there sirens in the seas of Erinia?" he murmured faintly.

## CHAPTER V

THE Prince did not sleep that night. He was haunted through restless, wakeful hours by that magical voice.

Through closed eyelids he saw again the sheeted silver of the ocean, and the formless width of the Island whither he was bound.

Life had opened out for him in unexpected channels. The tranquility and selfishness of past years had been suddenly disturbed. He could not forget the strange feeling that had come to him as he sat on that rock. The feeling that he was but a small, unimportant human unit in the vast universe, where, strong with the majesty of ages past, and yet to be, a mighty Power was enthroned in triple dignity of Creator, Protector, and Judge.

"Yet He made us when we had no need or knowledge of *Him*," thought the Prince, who was some-

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times philosophical. "Was it because he needed us?"

A kingdom without subjects would be valueless, a Protector without dependants, unimportant; a Judge where all were innocent and law-abiding a mere sinecure. To suit a need there must be an adequate supply. A man required scope for his emotions and ideals. If they were cramped, forbidden, or turned into wrong channels, the result was disaster or discontent.

For the first time Prince Charming recognized that he had barely escaped the first, and was almost a prey to the last alternative. He had dropped, so it seemed, into a land of "Hurly-Burly." He was not known, not necessary, and apparently not important. He would have to stand on his own merits, and be judged by a new standard. It was like going to school for the first time. Before him lay books, tasks, rules—perhaps prizes.

He thought of the conquest of millions of patriots who had a king of their own; of factions and follies, and misrule and misconceptions. He felt a strong, and increasing desire to know these strange people. Yet to do so he must find an interpreter. One who knew every trait, and every virtue, and every weakness. Who was without prejudice, and could stand

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forth as exponent of the national heart and intelligence. Where was such a one to be discovered?

So restless, so fevered, so uncomfortable did he become, that at last he sprang from his hard and uncomfortable couch, and throwing on his clothes, went out for a bathe, as the sun was rising.

Not many times in his life had he chanced to be up so early. If it had happened, he was usually on his way *to* bed, not *from* it; and he remembered with some shame, that on those rare occasions his eyes had had a queer trick of seeing two suns in a movable landscape, and his tongue a way of escaping the control of his brain.

Now he breathed the delicious coolness of the morning air with eager lungs. His step was buoyant, his eye keen and bright. He had forgotten about waist measurements, and the *motif* of this pastoral symphony. Birds sang, leaves rustled; the dew on swaying boughs, touched his lips and his uncovered head, as he passed beneath the greenest trees he had ever seen. The quaint old town wore a strange beauty, the walls broken by shot and shell, and ivy-grown now by Nature's kindly help seemed like old friends, whose history and whose troubles he had known. He forgot to be critical, and began to enjoy.

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When he plunged into the lovely blue water, and felt its buoyant strength lift his limbs and bear him whither he would, he could have shouted like a school-boy.

His strong arms cleft the waves, as they rolled in slow majestic measure to the shore. He revelled in the warmth of the sunrays, and floating idly on the heaving ocean's breast; he watched the clouds melt from off the mountain tops, and the lovely green of the opposite shore set itself like a living emerald against the rose and gold of the radiant sky.

Life—simple, physical, human life seemed worth living at such a moment, in such a dawn. It was joy only to be, to exist—letting thought lie passive; asking of the passing moments no more than the wheeling sea-birds asked, as they too floated or rested on the sun-flushed waters.

The Prince was an excellent swimmer. He knew too the wisdom of saving strength and breath, and getting as much enjoyment as possible out of a contest with an element at once friend and foe. The wastide with him, and he threw himself on his back, and let it bear him on, and on, whither it would.

Suddenly a sound startled his placid progress.

He swung round, and lifted his head as the crest of a wave bore him upwards. It was the sound of the



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same voice he had heard the previous evening. To his surprise he discovered that he had been rapidly approaching the island. It rose before him now out of the blue waters—sun-crowned, verdant, lovely, as the Lady Agnes had told him it was.

Yet it was not on the island his startled gaze rested, but on a jagged broken reef that ran out from it. Perched on its extreme edge, surrounded by a flying cloud of ocean birds, was the nude figure of a girl. Slender, shapely, with white limbs half veiled in the length and luxuriance of her dusky rippling hair, the sky above, the sea below, she made a picture so exquisite that the approaching swimmer paused, wonder-struck, and abashed. She was quite unconscious of any other presence. She sat there, innocently revelling in the warmth of the new-born day, tossing her long locks to and fro, and singing a weird and wonderful song as she gazed into the blue and shining waters at her feet.

In his amazement the Prince forgot to strike out, and a wave more boisterous than its fellows suddenly swept over his head. He rose again to the surface, and as he shook back the hair from his eyes, and gazed once more towards the rock, the maiden turned her head and caught sight of his.

In an instant she sprang to her feet. The veiling

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hail fell over the dazzling whiteness of her form. He saw two swaying arms stretched downwards; there was a spring, a flash—and the rock was solitary.

The Prince gasped, and steadied himself on the strong rolling swell that met him. He went no nearer to the reef, only watched with eager eyes for the re-appearance of the fair diver.

He watched in vain.

"*Himmel!*" he cried below his breath, as he searched sea and land with momentary dread. "Is she drowned, or are there Mermaids in Erinia!"

Up and down, to and fro, on the crests of the billows the Prince sped in search of the mysterious maiden. He reached the jagged reef and rested against it. There was no sign of any living thing save the screaming, restless birds.

Wonder and alarm and conjecture racked his brain. It did not occur to him that the mermaid might be as at home in the sea as himself. Had, dived into waters whose every shoal, and current, and channel were known to her. Dived, mand swa *under* instead of *above* the water, until she was out of sight of this unwarranted intruder. While he was searching and watching in ever increasing anxiety, she had reached the little cave which served

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her as dressing-room, and was rapidly assuming her normal attire.

Her innocent mind was full of natural curiosity. "It was a man, I am sure," she was saying to the accompaniment of strings and buttons, and such simple mysteries as represented her toilette.

"But what a swimmer! What a distance! Not ever have I known a man to swim from the mainland to the Island. In boats, yes— But there was not a boat anywhere. Only that head, all golden in the sun. I wonder has he come to the rocks and rested, or gone back again?"

She fastened the rough, homespun bodice, and shook down her wonderful hair. It was all wet and tangled, but she did not stay to dry it. The sun could do that. Then she ran, barefooted, out of the cave, and mounted a steep flight of rough steps cut in the rock. The summit was covered with moss, soft and green as velvet. She stood there and gazed eagerly out to sea; then brought her eyes nearer home, and sought amongst boulders, and reef, and flashing pools of water for something which she did not name, but which at last translated itself into a human figure, clad in a blue and white striped swimming suit, resting on her own favourite rock.

His head was uncovered, and the gold hair she

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had admired curled close and thick about the brow, as the warm sun glittered above it. He looked up at her, she down at him. For a long time that curious enquiring gaze lasted. Then he spoke.

"So you are not drowned?" he said.

She laughed. "Drowned—I? Why, the sea could not drown me. It loves me too well. I am as used to it as the fish themselves. I do not ever remember being afraid of it. But you—how is it you swam so far? The land is distant two miles or more. No one has ever come all that way on the water without a boat."

"Perhaps I too love the sea so well that it will not drown me," he answered. "I did not mean to swim so far, but, when you disappeared, I felt bound to learn what had happened. I took you for a mermaid, do you know?"

"What is that?" she asked simply.

"A sea-maiden, who rules a kingdom that no mortal may enter. She lives in a wondrous palace in the deepest depths of the ocean. Rarely does she come to its surface, but when she does and shows herself to mortal man he must do all she bids and follow at her will, and never more be free or happy or content with the world above that Ocean kingdom."

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"That is a fairy story," she said, and he thought how rich and full and lovely were the tones of her voice despite its Erinian accent; and her face with the wonder and the sweetness of it, seemed to call out of his heart a feeling chivalric tender, adding, such as no woman's face had ever called forth before.

"A fairy story," she went on, regarding him gravely from her coign of vantage. "I know many such stories."

"Do you live here?"

"Oh, yes! All my life has been spent on this island. It's my grandfather that owns it. He is the King."

"Oh!" said the Prince. "And you are then a Princess?"

"I am not called so," she answered simply. "I am only—Sheila."

"It is a charming name," he said. "A Princess might envy it. And so you have lived here all your life? Are all the people like you?"

"I have never thought about what I am like," she answered. "The good sisters who have taught and trained me, say it is not well for a woman to do that. We are as God made us."

"Not all of you," thought the Prince, with a sudden memory of artificial beauties in the world beyond,

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whom it would surely have puzzled their Creator to recognise as His handiwork.

"So there is a Convent here," he said aloud. "Do they receive guests?"

"Yes," she said. "A part of it is set aside for travellers, should any come. But they seldom stay. They visit the island for a few hours, coming over from the mainland yonder. That is all." Then she looked at him with a sudden memory of his attire. "You swam over," she went on. "How are you going to get back?"

"The same way I came," he answered. "I will confess, however, that I never intended to come so far. Your voice lured me across the waters. By the way, were you singing last night, in the moonlight?"

"I do not remember," she said slowly. "Perhaps. I often do. I was out with the fishing boats."

"I was on the shore and heard you," he said softly. "If I come to this island—again, will you sing for me?"

"Surely I will," she said. "It is a little thing to ask. But I am thinking it will not be well for you to swim so far without rest or food. If you will follow me ——"

The Prince regarded his costume gravely. "I am scarcely attired for a Royal visit," he said.

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*She laughed, or rather it seemed to him that a* chime of silver bells rang out on the golden air. "Oh! I forgot," she said. "Perhaps it would not be comfortable for you. Well, then you shall have a boat to take you back. The fishermen are all up and about by this time. I will send one to you."

"You are too good, fair Princess," he said softly, and his eyes looked up at her lovely face, with a reverence and admiration that she was too childishly innocent to translate. She turned, yet seemed reluctant, and glanced back, her white feet and slender ankles gleaming like marble on the green moss.

"You will come—again?" she said shyly.

"This very day," he answered. "I have business on this island, and I am coming to ask the hospitality of the good sisters at the Convent."

"Oh!" she said, with pleased surprise. "You will be very welcome. I will bid them prepare for you!"

She waved her hand in farewell, and vanished.

The Prince sat silently on the rugged spur of rock lost apparently in thought. When the splash of oars roused him, he started like a sleeper recalled from dreamland.

"Agnes did not tell me of—this," he said.

## CHAPTER VI

THE Prince heard a few 'surprising facts from the fishermen. He learnt that the Island called 'Crooknagoora,' for short in native parlance—contained about a hundred or *more* inhabitants. That the King was popularly known as 'Johnny de Gobbs.' A title which even to his limited experience of royal cognomens savoured somewhat of familiarity. That the average age of the Crooknagoorites was about threescore years. That when they reached that period of maturity they began to grow younger, until they regained the ripe experience of infancy, after which it was not deemed advisable to manifest any further interest in them.

The King lived in a beautiful 'pallus' built entirely of marble, and possessing a thatched roof. He had unlimited authority, and daily issued com-



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mands which no one dreamt of obeying. He was equally satisfied whether they were, or were *not*—carried out.

“You see, sor, it’s this way,” said the chief spokesman (who was of that purely Erinian type, now familiarized to the Prince by reason of the patriot and the House-that-Jack-Built controversy), “It’s a pleasure to the ould gintleman to consider himself supayrior to ourselves and sure we wouldn’t be pre-vintin’ it, whin it’s not a ha’porth av harm it does to any av us. An’ it’s not m<sup>uch</sup> av a kingdom to boast av, an’ poor enough we be winter times an’ hard put to it for a morsel to ate. But sure the whiskey’s good, an’ no questions axed, an’ the praties grow for the pleasure av it; an’ the soil—why a hand’s turn av a spade manes a crop spring time. An’ we don’t vex ourselves about rint or taxes, or iny sich inconvaynient trifles, an’ as for laws sure the King makes thim, an’ we brakes thim, an’ altogether it’s very comfortable an’ pleasant we are. An’ if ye’ve a spare day or two lyin’ idle-like on yer hands ye can jist come an’ see av there’s a wurrd av a lie in what I’ve tould ye.”

The Prince courteously expressed his entire belief in Crooknagoorian integrity, and intimated that even his limited experience of the beauties

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of the Island had inspired him with an ardent desire to become better acquainted with it.

Transformed immediately from the unimportance of a chance summer-swallow to the prospective dignity of a plucked goose, he was regaled with more legends, idylls, and histories than his brain could well contain.

It was a welcome relief when the shore was at hand. He found his clothes and his purse, and rewarded the Crooknagoorities with a liberality that astounded even their moderate expectations. This generous action purchased for him such a wealth of blessings and good wishes that he felt he could immediately open a banking account to the credit of his own virtues, in this world and the next.

Laughing and elated he got into his clothes, and went back to the Hotel.

He ordered breakfast and repacked his bag, and made some few notes in his pocket-book by way of entertaining Agnes. He had the coffee-room to himself, and despatched ham and eggs, and tea and toast with a hearty goodwill, that spoke well for the air of Erinia.

He ascertained that the usual way of getting across to the Island was to take a boat from

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the little landing - stage at the mouth of the river.

The waiter who gave the information seemed astonished when the visitor stated he should not require his room that night.

"Sure you're never goin' to *stay* on Crooknagoora, sor!" he gasped. "Well, glory be, tafe an ages! Av iver I heard the likes! Why 'tis starved ye'll be intirely, unless ye can live on fish an' purtaties an' butter-milk, for divil a bit or sup else will ye find there. *Stay*—is it? Sure no one goes to the place axcept to pass a few hours. Ye can walk from the North to the South, latitude and longitude included, in two shakes av a lamb's tail?"

"Are there lambs there, then?" inquired the Prince.

"Divil a one did I iver hear av, save an old ram as belongs to the poor ould lunatic, Johnny de Gobbs. And he kapes him there for the pleasufe an' divarsion av seein' the haythin animal butt the strangers as go there into the sea. Knowin' he is, as the Evil One, an' some say that he's ould Nick himself, "*Stay*," he repeated again, "Holy Mary! it's a quare way av spendin' a holiday anyways. Ye'll be back here by to-morrow morning's daylight, or I'm not spakin' truth. Yes, an' glad to be on *terry-firmay*, as they say, for sure, not wishin' to put yer honour off iny

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sich intention, that same island has a bad name. Thru for ye, as I'm a livin' man. Oh, quare things has been done there, and not a soul save mad folks live in it. Mad, crazy as Frinchman they are, ivery mother's son av them."

"What about the Convent, and the Good Sisters?" inquired the Prince.

"Oh! poor sows! It's just to keep the crazy folk from Purgatory entirely they wint over, and then settled thimselves in a shanty av their own. They tache an' they do some kind of lace-work that gits sold in the town, but sure it's well-nigh starvin' they are. The priest from St. Mary's here, he goes over once in a way, to hold Mass, but as often as not he's drowned in the crossin'. Whin the wind blows, as it does most saysons, no one can get to or from Crooknagoora. But I'll not be mintioning any more av its inconveniences for fear av yer honour changing yer mind. An' sure that ud be a pity, seein' as how yer so mighty set on goin' there. All the same, I'll keep a nice bit av dinner for yer honour when ye come back to-night."

"Thank you," said the Prince, gratefully. And he paid his bill and gave the expected "tip." A further store of blessings and good wishes were by this means added to his new credit account.

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The passage to the island was unattended by any special feature save the wonder expressed by his ferryman, and polite hints that he would speedily return to the mainland.

He was put ashore at a small landing-stage, near the fisherman's huts. A rough, steep road wound upwards to the Convent which was perched upon the highest point of the island. He looked about for the palace and its dependencies, but saw no building of any importance on his way.

Arrived at the Convent he rang a bell in the stone gateway above which was carved the sign of the Holy Cross, from which the building took its name. A wrinkled old portress answered his summons.

He asked whether he could be accommodated with a room for a few days, and after some delay she returned and informed him that the Mother Superior would receive him and answer his request in person. He was led into a stone yard, and then through a doorway into a bare, dreary room, furnished only with a wooden table and chairs. The whitewashed walls were hung with pictures of the saints, and common-coloured prints of the stations of the Cross.

"Heavens!" thought the Prince. "What could Agnes have done in such a place?"

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A door opened, and a tall, thin woman stood before him. She was robed in black, and the hard stiff linen of her head-dress framed a face worn and sad, yet with a calm Madonna-like beauty that had a charm of its own. The Prince bowed low, and mentioned his desire for accommodation, backed by reference to the Lady Agnes.

A smile of welcome beamed in the kindly grey eyes of the Mother Superior. She assured him that any friend of the charming English lady was heartily welcome, and that he might have the same rooms as she had used, if he desired.

When shown, they proved to be very small and plainly furnished. One as a bedroom, the other as a sitting-room. They were apart from the Convent cells and refectory, and looked out on an enclosed garden, green, and well kept, bright with flowers and shaded by tall trees.

The Prince declared himself charmed, and having arranged hours for meals, and deposited his travelling bag, he went out to explore the island.

From its highest point, a grass-covered peak that sloped upwards to the Convent, it looked to him of oval shape. It was fertile, well wooded, and trees and grass were all of the wonderful vivid green so peculiar to Erinia. A bright stream wound through

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meadow lands where sheep were grazing; the blue sea gleamed on every side. To right and left towered the mountains of the opposite coast, green and purple in the shade of shifting clouds. In the centre of the island lay a little lake, bright as a mirror; dropped there, so it seemed, to reflect the passing beauties of sky and cloud, sunshine and moonlight.

"What a fairy spot," thought the Prince. "Now I wonder where that palace is, and His Majesty of Crooknagoora?"

There certainly was no sign of any building of more importance than the Convent to be seen from his elevation. After a time he descended and made his way to the lake. He met not a soul, but the sight of grazing cattle, and browsing sheep, gave promise of better provision on the island than the hotel waiter had prophesied.

He seated himself on the bank and gazed dreamily over the water, blue as the sky it reflected. How quiet and restful it was here; how far away seemed the world of men and women he had left. He thought of his boyhood, of youth with its dreams, of all he had meant to do and never done; of wasted hours, and lost opportunities; of temptations he had never resisted, of noble ideals destroyed by the

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mockery of worldly counsellors. He thought of his first love, dead now, her heart broken by the tyranny of a royal decree; and then he thought of his betrothed wife, and that image faded and gave place to another—a vision of innocent youth and rare beauty, with childlike radiant eyes.

Instinctively his lips spoke her name.

"Sheila"—he murmured, and as if the word had been a magic summons a light laugh echoed it, and the Princess of the Island stood before him.

"So you have come," she said. "And how do you like the Convent? Were they not pleased to receive you?"

"I have entered it as a lay brother," he answered jestingly. "I am at their service, and at your's. Tell me though where is the Palace, and when may I pay my respects to your royal Grandfather? I assure you I am all impatience to do so."

She regarded him with perplexity. "Do you suppose we live in a palace?" she asked. "A Palace like those wonderful places in the picture books?"

"I thought it—unlikely," he answered.

"I will take you to my home, if you like," she said. "It is not far."

He sprang to his feet, and she surveyed his goodly stature and fair Saxon face with innocent admiration.



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"How tall you are," she said. "I have seen no one so tall."

"I hope," he said, "you do not disapprove of my height?"

"Oh! no," she answered readily. "I think all men should be tall and straight, and noble-looking."

Her sweet frank eyes said so plainly that he seemed all of these in her sight, that the Prince felt embarrassed. He wondered what she would say if she saw him in one of his splendid uniforms, with the glitter of Imperial Orders, and stars upon his breast.

"But in your country," she went on, "the men are all stately and noble-looking, are they not?"

"Well," said the Prince truthfully, "they vary. We have a national standard of height, of course, but I am bound to say it is a little above the reach of most people."

"Oh!" she said disappointedly, "I thought they were all like you."

"Not all," he said encouragingly. "Of course they would like to be, but it is not always possible to resemble what we most admire, or do what pleases us best."

"I always do what pleases me," she said gravely.

"Then you are a very fortunate person, Princess," he replied.

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"Why do you still call me that?" she asked.

"Because if your grandfather is a king, you must be a princess. At least," he added softly, "it pleases me to call you so."

"Oh!" she answered, "if it pleases you—" And then paused abruptly.

"Does that make any difference?" he asked presently.

"Of course. The good sisters have told me it is right to give pleasure to others; to be amiable and unselfish in small things as in large."

He thought the good sister's doctrine might be carried a little too far by a pupil so naturally submissive, but he did not say so—then. The reading of this fresh simple page of girlhood was as refreshing as a draught of pure water to a palate fevered and furred by midnight potations. He only wanted her to go on talking, and yield to him the unusual role of listener. The change from routine and public life to a personal and private situation was surprising and delightful. He felt a new individuality making acquaintance with an older one from which time and circumstances had separated it.

That sensation is not altogether an uncommon one.

The girl, however, had grown thoughtful. She walked beside him, her eyes on the ground, and he—

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studying the exquisite profile presented to him, was not inclined to disturb her. She stopped quite suddenly, and pointed to a small stone cottage bowered in green. Its surroundings were a group of hens, a tethered cow, and a regiment of various sized pigs. Before the door, in an old wicker chair, sat an ancient man. His white hair fell to his shoulders, a battered straw hat was upon his head. •

“That,” said Sheila, “is my home, and—there,” she added, “is—grandfather.”

The Prince stood still and followed her directing gesture. He said nothing. Perhaps from surprise, perhaps from awe, at thus unexpectedly intruding upon “Royalty at Home.”

He thought what a chance the lady interviewer had lost by not discovering this kingdom, and marvelled at Agnes’s silence on the subject.

The king meanwhile had perceived them, and was smiling quite a genial welcome. He took off his straw hat and waved it boyishly.

“Hurroo!” he said. “I’m mighty plazed to see ye.”

The Prince raised his own hat, not to be outdone in courtesy. “Have I the honour,” he asked, “of addressing the King of Crooknagoora?”

“That same,” said the old man chuckling. “And

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from what parts have ye come, sor, to visit me majesty ! ”

“ This gentleman, grandfather, is from the country of the Great Queen,” said the girl gently.

“ Ah, now ! is that so ? Well, then, a mighty stranger that good lady’s makin’ av herself,” observed the old man. “ Maybe ye’d tell her so when ye go back, sor. Sure I’d be ready to go across the sea yonder to give her a welcome to me kingdom, an’ wud make no ceremony wid her at all, at all, but trate her jist like one av ourselves. An’ she cud have a donkey carriage to herself to drive whiniver she plazed, which I’ve been told pleasures her ladyship greatly. Oh ! indade, yes. I’ve taken a great dale av interest in her, in me time. We two bein’ naybours, so to spaké, in adjaysint kingdoms. The good lady’s well, I trust, and bearin’ her age an’ infirmities wid Christian fortitude like meself ? ”

The Prince’s eyes twinkled. He thought of a certain August Personage in the “ adjaysint kingdom ” just alluded to, and wondered what she would say did she hear this unacknowledged sovereign’s frank speeches. He, however, assured the monarch that Her Majesty was in the enjoyment of excellent health, and promised to lay before her this courteous invitation to revisit Erinia.

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"I don't know that I'd have accommodation for her here belike," observed the king thoughtfully. "But there used to be some palusses knockin' about on the mainland beyant, an' I'd be willin' to have one done up for Her Ladyship. Jist give me a month or two av notice like a dacent man, an' I'll issue my commands!"

Not a muscle of the Prince's face changed during this conversation. Sheila's grave eyes were upon him, and not for worlds would he have hurt her feelings.

"Ye might be offerin' the gentleman some refreshment, Sheila," said the old man presently. "Wud ye go within, sor, or share the banquet wid meself out here?"

The Prince expressed a preference for "out here," and the ancient monarch nodded approval of his decision.

"I'm a bit weak in the knees these times," he said. "An' whin I'm once settled in the sunshine it's little inclinashun I have to change to the intayrior av me residence. And its natural an' homely out here wid the pigs, the dacent creatures, having their divarsions, an' the hens clucking, an' me oul'd ram—(where is the villain? Sure, sor, an' you're the first visitor he hasn't honoured wid a welcome!) Billisarius, ye sly ould divil, ye! Come here an' show yerself!"

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On receiving the royal command the owner of this invitation deigned to appear. He was an enormous ram, with long trailing beard and a pair of horns that seemed uncomfortably desirous of acquaintance with the personality of the newly arrived guest.

After sundry playful feints at attacking the stranger, which afforded him considerable embarrassment, Billisarius suddenly stood bolt upright on his hind legs; then with a curious bleat, that might have been either welcome or warning, he made a charge full at the royal corporation, and laid the Prince gently but firmly on his back.

The ancient monarch chuckled.

"The naturalty av the baste! Sure 'tis amazing," he remarked.

## CHAPTER VII

THE Prince recovered his equilibrium to the accompaniment of those amused chuckles.

"The crayture's full av his play," murmured the King apologetically. "He woudn't be afther hurting a new born babe all the same. Sit down on the bench beyant, sor, an' don't be takin' any notice av him."

"It's his taking notice of *me* that I object to," said the Prince, feeling for once in his life as undignified as any ordinary non-royal personage. "Could you not induce him to turn his—ahem!—attention, elsewhere?"

"Down, Billy, down, ye thievin' ould sifner you! Sure the gintleman's not going to harm ye! Divil a bit the crayture's mindin' a wurrd I'm sayin'. Maybe yer lordship wud give a call to Sheila there.

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"Tis she can tache the raskil better manners than aythur one av us."

The Prince, feeling no inclination for any more of Billie's amenities, called the girl loudly. She took in the situation at a glance, and producing a thick stick from behind the door drove the animal off.

"I hope he didn't annoy you, sir?" she said, much concerned. "He's apt to be fierce and unpleasant with strangers. I ought to have remembered."

"Oh! he's a most amusing animal," said the Prince cheerfully. "A fine specimen too. Have you—many more like him on the Island?"

"Sorra a one but himself," said the monarch mournfully.

The prince felt devoutly thankful for that information. A little of Billy went a long way, especially with the wind in its present quarter.

Sheila now brought out a small wooden table and spread it with a cloth of snowy Irish linen. On it she placed home-made bread, butter, and a dish of honey. Then she retired for a few moments and came back with a jug of foaming milk, fresh from the cow.

The Prince felt as he ate, and drank, that foreign



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"Bads" and "Curs" had much to learn. He had never enjoyed anything there as he enjoyed this simple meal. The ancient monarch partook of the banquet in the form of "sop," but his manners left nothing to be desired, and he gave the Prince a surprising amount of information respecting his kingdom, also free permission to fish in the lake.

"There's throuth there," he observed, "an' salmon, an' maybe a herrin or two."

The Prince looked surprised. He thought it a curious piscatorial combination for a small inland lake, but then Erinia was a country of wonders!

"Ye'll be tellin' the gentleman the legend av the fairy fish, Sheila," he ended up.

"I should like to hear that," said the Prince, wondering at the same time if a cigarette would be a breach of etiquette in this primitive court. His doubt was set at rest by the King's request for a "blast av his pipe."

Sheila produced and lit it, and the Prince, emboldened by the royal example, took a cigarette from his case and requested her kind offices for himself. Then she cleared the table and brought out some lace-work, and set herself to accomplish the double task of working and story-telling at the same time.

The Prince felt he wished no harm even to his

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worst enemy or nearest relative at that moment. So soothing, so peaceful were his surroundings, that the gentle music of the girl's voice seemed as part of their quiet harmony. And the legend of the lake, as she told it, became a poem—a poem destined to linger in his memory as no affairs of state had ever done.

"Hundreds of years ago," she began. "There lived upon this island a king who had only one child, a daughter. Her name, like mine, was Sheila; but she was clever and beautiful, and everyone loved her, and the stories of her beauty and goodness spread everywhere and reached distant countries, so that many foreign princes wanted to marry her. But she would have none of them, for she wanted to live in her own island, and marry one of her own nation. Now it chanced one day that she left the palace which was built by the lake, and took a little boat and went out sailing on the blue water as she often did. And as she sailed she heard a voice singing, and the singing was the most wonderful she had ever listened to. But though she looked everywhere she could see no one, and that surprised her very much. Day after day the same thing happened. As soon as she sailed over the lake she heard the singing, but when she was with anyone else it never came. At last one night when the moon was shining, a strange longing

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came over her to visit the lake, and she rose from her bed and went down the palace steps, and stood by the water side gazing at the moon's reflection on its shining surface. And as she gazed, it parted and fell aside, and walking towards her was a young man. And when she saw him she knew that he was the beautiful singer; and they spoke together, and he told her how he was a Prince of a kingdom *below* the island, which was a hundred times more beautiful and wonderful. And out of that meeting came many more, and the saints alone know what would have happened, but that one night the King, her father, heard voices by the lake side and stole out and listened to them, and knew his daughter was bewitched, and in his rage he killed the Prince with his sword and threw him into the lake. But from that hour the Princess pined and grieved, and one day they saw her dead body floating in the water just where she used to hear the mysterious singing. And the King sent boats to fetch her, but, when the man came near and bent over to seize her and draw her in, she suddenly disappeared, and far down in the clear water they saw floating a beautiful snow-white fish. Only its eyes were not like fish's eyes, but limpid and large and melancholy—the eyes of the drowned Princess, and from that day if any one fish-

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ing catches the white fish, he throws it back in the water again, for the story goes that she must float to and fro her lover's kingdom until he himself, in the form of a man, catches her and releases her from the spell."

"A lovely story," said the Prince. "And has the right fisherman ever appeared?"

"No. Very few people ever fish there, for they have to gain permission, and they are always told about the white fish."

The Prince glanced at the ancient monarch. He had fallen asleep in the warm sunshine, lulled by the soothing effects of tobacco and the, to him, oft heard legend. All the air around was full of drowsy sweetness. The hum of bees, the scent of the briar, the twitter of birds in the boughs above.

The Prince lit another cigarette. "And there are men," he said dreamily, "in the world beyond this kingdom, who disbelieve in Arcadia!"

Sheila's lovely eyes met his own over the tangling threads and bobbins of her work. "I wish," she said, "you would tell me of that kingdom from which you come—of the laws, and government, and people. And the ladies—one comes here sometimes. So lovely she is and gracious; and she can speak many languages besides your's, and sing in them. She

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used to sing to me in the chapel when I played the organ."

"Yes," murmured the Prince, "Agnes is accomplished."

"Agnes!" echoed the girl quickly. "Why that is her name—the Lady Agnes. Do you know her?"

The Prince recovered from momentary embarrassment. "It is not an uncommon name in my country. I know more than one lady who owns it. In fact it is a sort of family name."

"What is your family name?" asked Sheila.

"Mine?" He paused and watched a smoke wreath floating towards the briar bush. "Oh! mine is a very common one; it is in fact—Smith."

A little shadow of disappointment crossed the transparent mirror of her face. "Smith—it is not very pretty," she said. "Is there any name before it?"

"Oh! yes—in fact there are several. You may take your choice. Victor is one."

"Victor! That is the name of an English Prince. I have heard of him and read of him too. The Lady Agnes used to lend me newspapers, and she had seen him often, she told me. And I used to ask her what he was like."

"Oh!—and what did she say?" asked the Prince, growing interested.

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"Very handsome, and noble-looking."

("Ah! I always thought Agnes a woman of taste," murmured the Prince.)

"And she said also," continued Sheila, "that on account of his beautiful manners, and his grace, and kindness, and courtesy, even from the time when he was quite a little boy, everyone called him 'Prince Charming.'"

"I have heard of that before," murmured her auditor. "It is rather misleading, don't you think? I can't fancy I'm like the hero of a fairy tale!"

"You!" cried Sheila, surveying him with wide-open eyes. "But you are not the Prince Victor!"

"Of course not. Who said I was? I meant, of course, the other fellow, the real Prince."

He felt his face grow warm under the sun tan, and changed the subject. "What glorious sunshine," he said admiringly.

With feminine pertinacity she returned to the discussion. "What other names have you beside Victor?" she asked.

"Oh! Clarence," he answered, "and then Edward, and Robert, and James. They gave me a good many as they were about it, didn't they?"

"I like Victor best," she said. "There is some-

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thing martial, conquering, strong about it. And it seems to suit you better than—Smith."

"I am glad you think so," he answered. "I prefer it myself. Would you like to call me by it?"

"Oh! yes," she cried eagerly. "Because then I can fancy I am speaking to *him*. Not, of course, that I ever would dare call him that. Even Lady Agnes didn't. She always said 'His Royal Highness,' or 'the Prince.' It is indeed a beautiful name," she added softly.

"I never thought so—before," said the Prince.

"And what do you do?—I mean are you anything in Government, or Parliament, or the army, you know?"

"The Smith's," answered the Prince, "never do anything. They don't require to. They are an ancient family, they date back to the days of—William the Conqueror."

"Oh!" she said somewhat disappointedly, "Has their money lasted all that time?"

"It has; by a little judicious help from foreign alliances, and Jew financiers."

"It seems perplexing to me," said Sheila simply.

"No doubt. There are no Jews in Arcadia. They could not make a living."

"Would you not rather spend your life in a place

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like this?" she asked presently, "than in a large city where there are so many wicked people and everyone is trying to outwit his neighbour, and the sun is hidden by smoke, and one never sees a great wide sky-roof over one's head like *that*?"

She glanced up, and by so doing, her bare head and tilted chin, and lovely throat took a new beauty.

Gazing at her, the Prince forgot to answer her question.

After a spell of silence she left off contemplating the clouds, and turned her eyes on him. Perhaps his own were more eloquent than he imagined, or something in them spoke a truer language than his tongue, for a warm rosy flush swept from cheek to brow, and she turned sudden downcast lids on her lace-work.

"And so," she said, "you don't do anything. I thought all men worked?"

"Some exist," said the Prince placidly, "or let other people work for them."

"It sounds very lazy and selfish. Why, even your Prince works. Lady Agnes told me how good a soldier he was, and how much he knew of the government of a country, and how his courtesy and cleverness had made him a favourite with all the foreign



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Courts he visited. She said he worked harder than many men of business."

"So he does," said the Prince. "For pleasure is very fatiguing."

"And you live only for pleasure?" she said reprovingly. "Why don't you take example from your future King?"

The Prince laughed amusedly. "I suppose because I'm a lazy beggar," he said, "or else that the—Smiths never took kindly to examples."

"Yet a good example is a noble thing," she made answer. "Think how it affects others, how it influences the weak and encourages the strong."

He looked at her with curiosity. How wise she was in her simple way. How direct and candid, and how she managed to hit the truth home with a word! Example—well, when he had interviewed conscience on some rare occasion, such as a State Funeral that proved Royalty but human, or on a sleepless night when a down pillow or a satin coverlet had been ineffectual aids to slumber, he had owned that his sins were many, and his example rather to be avoided than followed. It was odd that those few simple words uttered by a mere girl should waken an equally uncomfortable conviction.

Were she and conscience in league to force him

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to take life seriously despite all efforts on his own part. He did not like to feel uncomfortable, especially at holiday time.

He threw away his extinct cigarette and rose.

"Come and show me the way to the lake," he said.

## CHAPTER VIII

It was night, and a brilliant moon was shining over a certain spot in the Bavarian Highlands which a select section of society had decreed was to be a health-resort for its exclusive use.

In the balcony of the Exclusive Hotel, where prices were arranged with a view to terrorizing rash intruders forwarded by Messrs. Cook, sat the Lady Agnes. By her side was Prince Harold.

In the grounds, graceful ladies walked and talked and listened to the music of a specially engaged band, or flirted discreetly to the accompaniment of rippling waters, and nightingale's songs. There was a delightful atmosphere of simplicity about this place that almost made the select visitors believe they were ruralizing. A beautiful ancient *Schloss* dating from the sixteenth century had been purchased by a

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discerning syndicate of wealthy Jews, and turned into a Kurlhaus, which gave an excuse for sipping unpleasant waters in pleasant company every morning. The evenings were sacred to concerts and dances. There would have been gambling had not a foolishly scrupulous Government forbidden it. But to compensate for that deprivation, the visitors played baccarat and bridge and poker in their own rooms at the Hotel. On this special night the heat had driven them out of doors.

Lights sparkled through the trees from the chalêts and villas scattered by the river's banks; groups sauntered to and fro, their voices sounding distinctly on the still night air. The valley was dusky with shadows of the high pine-forests. The range of mountains clasped it like a belt of silver.

The Lady Agnes had been silent for quite two minutes. Her eyes wandered from moonlight to shadow, from the sheen of water to the dusk of the trees. She sighed.

"What false, absurd lives we live!" she said suddenly.

The Prince looked mildly surprised.

"Do we?" he said somewhat stupidly. "I find mine very pleasant."

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"Oh—you!" said Lady Agnes, and laughed softly. "I do believe you think peacock's feathers become you," she added.

"Don't you?" he asked.

"You carry them off very well," she said. "But you don't expect me to say you come up to the rightful wearer, I suppose?"

"No," he answered. "You—would never say that."

She waved a fan discreetly in the still night air, and the fluttering of its shadow disguised the expression of her face.

"Of course," he continued, "Everybody knows that the papers made a mistake; still no one has taken the trouble to contradict it."

"It was scarcely worth while," she said.

"I wonder how he likes the change?" he continued. "Odd that he hasn't written."

"Not odd if you knew the place where he is," said the Lady Agnes. "There isn't such a thing as a Post Office."

"I hope nothing will happen to him," said Prince Harold, somewhat uneasily. "Are the people trustworthy?"

She laughed. "Primitive as in the time of the early Britons. The world's march has left them centuries behind. They rise with the sun and go

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to bed with the first star. They live on what their own labour gives them, and drink—what do you suppose?”

“Something called *potheen*. I have heard of it.”

“No—milk.”

The Prince gave an exclamation of horror. “And you have sent him *there*? Why, it will kill him!”

“Oh! no,” said Lady Agnes. “On the contrary, it will do him good. You have no idea how beneficial a complete change of diet is.”

“I wonder how long he will stay? I suppose—” he broke off, and looked keenly at her face. “I suppose there is no other sort of attraction on the island.”

“I know what you mean. I think there's no possible danger of *that* sort.”

She had not seen Sheila for a year. And then she had been a child, with her skirts to her ankles, and a mane of hair plaited and hanging to her knees.

“I wonder what he does with himself,” continued the Prince. “No cards, no Court, no women, no letters.”

“One very soon gets accustomed to doing without things,” said Lady Agnes.

“And—with them,” said Prince Harold.

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"You are certainly benefitting by a mistake. Let us hope the Princess won't come across our path. I live in fear. She would soon discover you."

"It would be a case of the two Dromios, wouldn't it? But why should the Princess discover me? Her acquaintance with my cousin is of the most formal description. The very change from uniform to ordinary dress would confuse her."

"Oh! don't suppose anything so ridiculous!" exclaimed the Lady Agnes petulantly. "Of course she'd know. Instinct would tell her you weren't the man she loved."

"I don't believe in that sort of instinct; at least not in Royal Families. And does she really love—the Prince?"

"I believe so. I have heard it on good authority. One of the ladies told me she fell in love with his photograph long before she saw him."

"And before he grew stout," said Harold, stroking his fair moustache. "Court photographers know their business."

"Of course you are wonderfully alike, but there is a difference. You have not his charm of expression, though you have his features."

He acknowledged the compliment by an ironical bow.

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"At least my figure——"

"Oh!" she said mischievously, "Madam Fileuse told me all about *that*."

He muttered something in his own language suspiciously like the title of a Wagner opera.

"Victor wears them too," he said, after this relief to his feelings.

She laughed merrily. "So much for friendship. And yet you say women give away each other's secrets!"

"What is secret in a Court?"

"True. Even the extent of Her Majesty's wardrobe is known to penny-a-liners. If I were a queen ——"

"You would make a very charming one," he said, with another bow.

"No doubt, but do you know what I would do first?"

"Abolish daylight Drawing-rooms?"

"That—of course. Then I should allow no unauthorised Court news to appear in any journal. 'Our own Correspondent,' the royal kitchenmaid or housemaid, or whoever she may be, should no longer be permitted to coin guineas for her romances."

"You would become unpopular."

"Better that than to be misrepresented; to have



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*the very dishes at one's dinner-table described and the recipes given. Really, when one comes to think of it, this age is terrible. Nothing is sacred or secret from the daily press. One is perpetually pilloried for the amusement of the populace."*

"And the fortunes of penny editors. How perseveringly they hunt us up too!"

She seemed abstracted. "I wonder," she said presently, "how long he will remain there?"

"From personal knowledge of the country you should be able to guess."

"Oh!" she said, laughing softly. "They are a most amusing people. I have thoroughly enjoyed my visits."

"You always looked remarkably well on your return."

"Because a change of life is more beneficial than a change of climate. It was absolutely refreshing to rise early, to drink warm milk fresh from the cow, and to bathe in a sea of liquid sapphire. To breathe air cool and invigorating. To hear no noise; never to have to exert oneself for the amusement or entertainment of others."

"That, at least, must have been a change—for you."

"You mean I do a good deal of it?"

"It is your life. I believe you must even have tried your charms on the natives of Erinia."

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"On the king perhaps. How funny it would be to be a queen in one's own right."

"You would be equal to it. What sort of monarch was he, by the way?"

"Well—he was primitive," she said, after a pause. "He had views of his own about laws and government, and three acres and things of that sort. And he had a cow—one. It was tethered near the palace so that he might have constant supplies."

"What sort of household?" enquired the Prince.

"A body-guard of his own, devoted entirely to himself and apt to resent the intrusion of strangers. No army, no navy."

"Be serious," he entreated. "Tell me was there really a king?"

"Really and truly. A limited monarchy—widely respected."

"But one has never heard of such a thing."

"No. I said *limited*. You see he won't allow newspapers, or a penny post, and the electric wire is unknown."

"Then Victor is quite cut off from communications?"

"Oh! he can go to and fro to the mainland. The King merely rules an island which the Prince was anxious to see."

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"Will he get decent food?"

"Fish, chiefly. And you know he likes fish. Three halfpence a dozen and one thrown in for luck! They cook very well at the convent," she added.

"It's to be hoped the nuns aren't young and pretty."

She laughed. "What a base insinuation. Haven't you faith in your cousin's morals! But set your mind at rest. The youngest of the Sisters was forty, and looked a hundred. Besides he won't see them. The Mother Superior looks after the visitors and they sit in a different part of the chapel. They're dear things, the nuns, I mean. I had serious thoughts once of joining their order. That was when they used to let me play the organ. Music always makes me feel religious. Does it you?"

"I can't say it does," he answered. "Except the sort we hear at Court."

"Yes, that's what I mean. A sort of solemn, sad, goodbye feeling. That's the worst of having so many relations, the Court is always going into mourning, and having dead marches and requiems and things. We ought to hire the Salvation Army to cheer us up."

He laughed. "I am glad though," he said presently, "that you didn't become a nun. Life has some

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pleasant—opportunities. It's a pity to shut oneself up from them and call them wicked."

"I suppose you call this an opportunity?"

"Well, I've never had so much of your company before. And we haven't quarrelled once."

"Unusual! I was going to say we hadn't had time. But perhaps it is that you are too occupied in playing a new rôle to be as disagreeable as your wont."

"Might it not be that you understand my feelings better?"

"Your sentimentality you mean."

"On my honour—no. There is only one Lady Agnes in the world."

"The name is not uncommon," she said laughing.

"I meant—for me," he said meaningly.

She rose and looked down at the sauntering groups, and a sigh fluttered to her lips.

"Why won't you believe it is no use," she said presently. "I can't care. Sometimes I wish I could, but I *can't*. It seems as if my feelings had all been frittered away; little bits scattered here and there. I shall never gather them up and make one good real parcel of them."

"The scattered bits," he said, "are only the chips that the sculptor's chisel has broken off. The real image remains behind."

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“I am glad you have made it a marble one,” she said. “You know now why I am immovable.”

## CHAPTER IX

UNCONSCIOUS of any anxiety in the hearts of those he had left behind, the Prince Charming lived his days and hours in serene content. He did not even trouble to go for letters. He found it quite possible to live without them, and as for news, why life had become a perfect kaleidoscope of novelty.

Speech, life, manners and customs ; what he heard, what he saw, were absolutely unlike anything he had previously heard or seen.

The ancient monarch and himself had become the best of friends. He entertained the visitor with opinions and anecdotes such as no country but Erinia could have evolved, and yet amidst the vagaries of his humour, and the rambling of his brain there would sometimes flash out a truth so pointed that the Prince acknowledged its power to pierce. Brogue

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is not synonymous with blunder, and caricature is not necessarily character.

The Prince had only made previous acquaintance with Erinians through the medium of plays or literature that represented them as an epitome of folly, *gaucherie*, and effrontery. But he had come to them without prejudice, and was ready to accept them at their best, if they chose to show him it. From the ancient man's storehouse of memories, and from Sheila's guileless lips he learnt a truer history of the nation than books had ever given him.

Sir Lucius O'Trigger is, after all, not Ireland's Irishman, though represented by the most brilliant genius of that nation. The Prince learnt that to laugh at a man is not to despise him, and that below the light-hearted surface that seemed to treat life as a jest, there beat a warm heart, a faithful nature, an amount of patience and tenderness with which the Erinian was rarely credited.

True the island was only a very limited space from which to judge; yet the world at large can only be judged by specimens that are forced into notice.

On the first Sunday the Prince passed there he had a long conversation with the priest, a man of

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good education, clear intellect and deep feeling. Quite unsuspecting of the rank and position of the Convent's guest, Father M'Quade talked to him with a frankness that, at times, was a little startling. For the Prince learnt of a latent bitterness in the heart of Erinia, a jealousy at long neglect, a natural intolerance of the iron heel that was for grinding into dust many cherished superstitions, and beloved customs. He learnt too of the country's struggles to produce a national literature. Of her battle with poverty, and famine, and plague, and ignorance, and neglect. He learnt that she sent her produce and industries to foreign markets in sheer discouragement at the treatment of her sister isle. That her children turned with bitter hearts and undreamt of energies to the welcome of strange lands.

And from a chance word here and there he learnt also how all this might have been remedied. How even now, the great childlike heart of the nation, quick to love, strong to hate, yet easily moved to pity as to mirth, might thrill and throb to the music of nobler patriotism, were the right chord but touched, the right word spoken!

So they were not wasted days or unfruitful hours that he spent at Crooknagoora, roaming from one point of loveliness to another of the beautiful island;



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watching the sea in the young hours of the dawn and in the silver glamour of moonlight ; listening to the music of convent bells, or the chants of the simple nuns ; watching the quiet black-robed figures pacing to and fro in their hours of exercise, and learning from the gentle Mother Superior such truths of serious simple import as were their rules of conduct, and their law of life. After the routine of Courts and ceremonies, the extravagance and luxury and perpetual action of his past years, this one pause of perfect rest came to him as a thing altogether unprecedented. Something of its peace stole into his heart, lulled his senses, filled his mind with visions beautiful and divine.

He knew it was only a mental phase ; that it could not last ; that even if it could, the old restless spirit would revive again, but while it *did* last he was grateful, and accepted it without question. Sometimes he wondered whether he was missed, if his absence had been remarked, or if Harold had managed to mislead inquiries ? Still he did not trouble to seek for letters. The world could get along very well without him for a time. The less he heard of it and its affairs, the more he was able to enjoy this rare holiday.

One moonlight night Sheila took him out in

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her little skiff to watch the fishermen at their work.

She could row and sail a boat as well as any of them, and the Prince acknowledging his own dependence on professional yachtsmen, wondered at her skill and confidence.

"How clever you are, Sheila," he said admiringly. "It seems to me, there is nothing you cannot do."

"Clever! Oh, no. I often think how dull and stupid I must seem after those great ladies, of whom you have told me, in your own land."

"I am glad you are not like them," he said softly. "Not like anyone I have ever seen or known. You are just—Sheila."

A sudden flush spread over her young face. "You do not call me Princess now."

"No. We have passed beyond the stage of formality and become friends. Only I cannot get you to call me Victor. Why is it?"

"There is something about you," she began—then paused abruptly.

"Not alarming, surely?"

"No, I find it hard to say exactly what I mean. It is as if you had been used to authority. To control and command. I think often you must be something

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in your own country, different from what you say you are."

"I am sorry," he said gravely, "that you think me untruthful."

"Oh! no, not that. It is only that you seem—"

"What?"

"So different, so very different from any other of the tourists and travellers who come here. Even Father M'Quade says that you are so well-informed, and educated, and accomplished."

"Perhaps," he suggested, "the specimens of my countrymen who have visited Crooknagoora have not been quite up to the standard we should have sent. The British tourist is a strange animal, you know. The fact of *being* British entitles him, in his own opinion, to insult, or laugh at any other nationality."

"They used to laugh at my grandfather," she said. "Not as you do, as if you understood his jokes and queer ways, but rudely. They called him 'Old Looney,' and 'Crack-pated Johnny.' I don't know what they meant, but the names didn't sound nice."

"They do not;" he agreed. "And how did they treat you?"

"Oh! I never went near them, if I could help it," she said frankly. "Besides it is only this year that the sisters bade me put up my hair, and wear these

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dresses, and shoes and stockings. They said I was too old to go about like a wild fisher child any longer."

"Too old, child." He sighed involuntarily. "How old are you—really?"

"Seventeen last Christmas," she said.

"And do you mean to live here all your life?" he asked.

"I suppose so. I have no one but grandfather, and if he dies, I shall go to the Convent."

"You might—marry?" suggested the Prince.

"Oh! no," she said quickly, and then grew rosy red. "I mean I should not care to do that"

"This is an enchanted Isle, you know, and you are a Princess; some day perhaps a fairy Prince will visit it and woo you, and take you captive to his own kingdom. How would you like that?"

"I think," she said simply, "that life isn't a fairy-tale any longer. I used to believe it once, but you see I am older now, and have learnt—things. The difference between men and woman, rank, and position, toil, and luxury. That one is not always happy, that one must sacrifice self-interest, even feeling, to duty."

"Good Heavens, child! who has been teaching you all this?"

She looked at him. A look so earnest, so mournful, so self-revealing that he felt a sudden pang of con-

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trition rend his heart. Yet for one brief moment he chained that look, and drank in its sweetness with the thirst of pure joy. He knew that it would haunt his memory; that one day it might even stand as a living reproach before himself and a recognized duty. Yet he could not deny himself that glimpse of the lovely soul; could not feel quite sorry for that frank betrayal of a maiden secret.

"Is it not true?" she said at last, and the glad ring had gone out of her voice, and her face in the moon-rays was white as carved ivory.

"Yes, it is true."

He could not jest now. The memory of many things he had said, of light seeds sown with manhood's heedlessness in the garden of a girl's fresh life came back as regrets come; met him in the shadowy depths of the eyes his own had sought so often. They fell before them now in sudden shame.

A spasm of anger seized him. Even in this land of jests was jesting to leave a sting behind it? Could one never take a step on the road of life but a shadow must dog it, and a host of unguessed-at possibilities spring ready armed on its track!

"It is true," he repeated, "but duties will not come to you in anything but pleasant guise. In this free, harmless life of yours nothing harsh or ugly

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would dare intrude. When I leave here I shall hold in my heart a picture of one happy place on earth, and one pure happy soul who reigns as its queen. I wish I could tell you, Sheila, how much that picture will mean. But of the best and sweetest things in life, one placed as I am may not speak !”

“ Ah !” she cried quickly. “ Then you acknowledge it. You are different from—the others, as I said. You are someone of rank, of note in your own country. Someone like the Lady Agnes.”

“ Yes,” he said quietly. “ I might, in point of position, rank almost with—the Lady Agnes.”

“ And she was noble ; a friend of the Queen’s, a person of the Court. *Almost*, you say. But perhaps you rank even higher. Perhaps—”

“ Do not pursue the fancy any further,” he entreated. “ Let us watch the fishermen. That was what we came for, was it not ?”

“ I think,” she said quietly, “ it would be better if, just once for all, I said what was in my heart to say. Then we need not speak of it—any more.”

“ Say on, then.”

“ It is only that from the first when you told me your name, I did not quite believe you. And I remembered what Lady Agnes used to say, and the stories of—of the Prince, whom all his people love

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so dearly. And then, last night, I searched for one of those papers with the pictures of the Court ceremonies, and the soldiers, and the great reviews. And at last I found what I wanted. It was a picture of a splendid-looking officer, mounted on a beautiful horse and wearing a beautiful uniform, and underneath the Lady Agnes had written something—two words only. And when I looked at your face again I knew it was the face of the soldier, and I knew who—you—were.”

She looked at him; the clear pure ivory of face and throat, exquisite as a dream, but her eyes, dark and earnest, were more dangerous in their innocent admiration than any dream could be.

“What were the two words?” he asked softly. And he bent towards her.

“Prince Charming,” she said.

## CHAPTER X

SILENCE fell after those two words.

Through that magical world of moonlight and sea the little boat drifted on unheeded. Down in crystal depths flashed the silver scales of thousands of fish. From afar came the sound of voices, as the men drew in their nets of living spoil. All else was peace and stillness, and the throbbing of pulses, passion-stirred.

For once in his life, perhaps for the first time, the Prince was fighting down the instinct of self. With everything to tempt him to forgetfulness, with beauty, such as he had never before desired, at his side, in his power, with the soft breath of night setting every pulse-beat to wordless melody, he yet chained back the impulse of his heart, fought down the demon that whispered temptings, subtle as those



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breathed in the ear of Faust when first he gazed on Gretchen.

Perhaps Sheila wondered at his silence, perhaps she understood. Her timid eyes sought his averted face and then fell abashed. If he were the Prince, the hero of her girlish dreams, the high-throned idol of her loyal heart, why then this hour was something so sacred and holy that, in all the years to come its memory would stand alone.

He had not denied, or rebuked. He only sat there—apart. The shadow of some serious thought was upon his face, the radiant moonlight touched that close-curved golden head she had first seen rising god-like from the blue embracing sea!

She did not interrupt his thoughts. She felt awed and yet happy. If he were what she had called him how honoured was her present position, how wonderful the chance that had sent him to her island and her side. If he were *not*, then still, to her, must he always seem the noblest, greatest, most wonderful of men; and still, above all other women, in this her loved and troubled country, was she to be envied!

Meanwhile she could wait on his silence in perfect content.

## PRINCE CHARMING

When he spoke at last, his voice was low, and earnest, and all its bantering mirth had fled.

"So, Sheila," he said, "you think I am a Prince?"

"*The Prince*," she answered, as if the world contained but one.

"I think," he said, "we will leave it—indefinite. But supposing you were right, supposing I had come from my country to yours to learn a few truths, facts, no matter what, of its government, or grievances, could you keep the secret for me?"

"You may trust me, Prince," she said gravely.

"Ah! don't, dear," he pleaded in sudden forgetfulness. "I cannot have you formal or unlike yourself. There is enough of that in my own land. A few days—and then I must leave this delightful island—and *you*. For these few days let all be as it has been. Not for worlds would I have you change. Surely a little thing like this discovery need make no difference. For if I am royal by heritage so are you by nature; and, somehow, I am inclined to think that yours is the truer sovereignty, Sheila. A heart so loyal, a soul so pure, a beauty so rare. . . Ah! child, perhaps some day when the burden of my duties presses heavy on my life, I shall wish I were back here, forgetful, and you—my only subject."

"I am glad I know," she said simply. "But it

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need make no difference, if that is your wish. Only 'it seems to me altogether wonderful and strange; and I am honoured above all my people."

"Honoured," he said, and then was silent, remembering how little honour would be credited to either of them could that world beyond see, and judge, and draw its own conclusions.

"Yes, it is a great honour. I can never forget it. I can understand a little why you came to Erinia, but not why you came to my island, and stayed there, and were so gracious and so kind to me."

"You cannot understand—that?" he answered. "Well, do not try, Sheila. Say it was a whim, a fancy, the attraction of your royal grandfather, or the fame of—well, the battering ram that seems the sole defence of his throne. These, any, or all of these, will serve as excuse; but, chief of all of my reasons must be that from boyhood upward, I have always longed to——"

The pause was so long that her lips at last framed the inquiry of her eyes.

"To—what, sir?"

He started. "To live on an island."

She laughed then, the soft silvery laughter he loved. "But you do live on one, yourself," she said.

"I should have said an *enchanted* island," he

## PRINCE CHARMING

answered. And something in his face held her awed and speechless.

Enchanted—was it really that to him? She could not play with words, nor use them to baffle, and wound, and betray, as the women of his world used them. Until his advent she had been ignorant of any charm or power of her own, of the passions and hopes that agitate humanity, of the visions and joys that illuminate youth. Sweet and simple and serene, so had been her days and her life. It puzzled and hurt her, that disturbance and unrest could spring from glance or word of a stranger.

"I cannot think why you should call it *that*," she said, at last. "Except for its beauty."

"That, of course, is the reason," he answered. "It holds the beauty of the rest of the world in a limited circumference. Mountain, lake, wood, sea, what more could one desire, save the perfect peace that blesses its days, and the harmless innocence of its inhabitants."

"The dawn is breaking already," she cried, suddenly. "Look!"

He followed the gesture of her hand, and saw the long veil-like shadows above the mountains, pierced with a tongue of flame. Then one by one the stars

## PRINCE CHARMING

paled, and the blue depths grew deeper, and over the quiet sea a trembling wave of colour spread and grew in ever widening glory. Then from afar on the highest peak a sudden winged spear of golden light darted like a radiant messenger, scattering vapours and shadows alike.

"The Angel of the Day," murmured the girl, and bent her head reverently to the message, and its new born glory.

For once in his life the man beside her envied the faith of childhood thus perfected in reverence.

The rising sun, the new born day! Type and symbol of humanity, with a lesson ever speaking in its daily miracle of birth. How many heed, or gaze, or care for its beauty, or note its lesson?

As the thought crossed Prince Charming's mind, he too bent his head in momentary sympathy with the child's reverent awe, in momentary regret for many a misspent hour that other dawns had rebuked unheeded.

"If I stayed here much longer," he thought, "I might become—almost—what she thinks me."

She lifted her head, and the radiance of her eyes was brighter than the dawn itself.

"Oh!" she said, softly. "To think that in one perfect wonderful hour we saw the dawn of a day

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together. All my life I shall remember that, and be glad of it!"

"If you are glad of it," he said. "So am I. If ever I do anything better, wiser, less selfish in the days that follow, I shall owe it to this hour, Sheila—and to you."

She made no answer in words, but he met her eyes and knew none was needed.

She turned the boat's head landwards, and they spoke no more.

As they reached the little quay where the boats were moored, he rose and held out his hand. "I am going to ask one more favour," he said. "Give me the rest of this day, to make perfect its first memories. It may be our last."

Her cheek paled suddenly. "Our last," she echoed faintly.

"I cannot remain here always," he said. "Enchantment is a dangerous thing, Sheila. It saps a man's strength and fortitude, it leads him into snares and temptations. It sometimes even steals his—honour."

"A man," she said. "But you are a Prince."

"And are not Princes men, my innocent child? Have they not eyes to see, hearts to pulse, blood to leap and burn, senses to thrill. Are not the passions

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and hopes of humanity for prince as well as for peasant? Is love's sweet madness to be denied the one, and granted to the other? My Princess of fairy-land, can your sweet eyes read no soul save by the light of your own purity and trust?"

From pale to rose red her cheeks grew at those impassioned words. He saw the signs of distress and checked himself.

"Run home now and have your breakfast," he said abruptly. "I will come for you in an hour's time."

He turned away, and went slowly up the hill-side to the Convent.

"My last day," he murmured. "Yes, it must be. Another week like this, and even Court and Queen and royal bride might be powerless to claim me again. Another week, and I might not leave her—unharméd."

. . . . .  
The monarch of Crooknagoora sat in state—his usual state—at the cabin door.

He greeted the Prince with his usual affability. "She's feeding the pigs," he observed, noting a wandering eye that turned to the cottage and its surroundings.

The Prince started. How incongruous it seemed. His Princess of the Dawn at such homely employ-

## BRINCE CHARMING

ment. He took a seat, and asked the king of his own royal condition and ailments, by way of passing the time.

"I'm not as young as I was," confessed the ancient ruler. "But I'm as lively at heart. And sure 'tis pleasant enough sitting in the sun and watching the dumb creatures at their playfulness, an' thinkin av all the mighty power I once had. For t'was meself was the knowledgeable man, sor, an' sorra a thing consarnin' the earth an' its saycrets, not to mintion chemisthery, an' botany, an' fishery, an' sich like sciences, that I wasn't able to put me hand to. Did I iver tell yer honour how I took a cargo of *\*scalpeens* to Dublin Bay me own self, wid no one in the wurld to help me, savin' Barney O'Gorman to see to the navigatìon of the craft. And a fine bargain I wud have made wid thim same, but for a power av herrins in the market that the foolish people had a preference for."

"What did you do with your cargo then?" asked the Prince, much interested in this quaint method of trading.

"What did I do wid thim?" repeated the monarch, "was that what yer honour was axin me? What did I do wid them?"

\*Pickled Mackerel.



## PRINCE CHARMING.

*He scratched his stubbly beard and looked vacantly about.* "Well, I wudn't like to desave yer lordship, bein' so friendly wid ye, but me memory's not what it was, so I'm not altogether *sure* whether we ate thim, or put thim back into the *say* agin."

"But I thought you said they were *pickled*."

"Ah! did I thin? Maybe they was, an' what the worse av that?"

The Prince gave up the conundrum.

"Was that your only voyage?" he enquired.

"Oh! there was a matter av two or three more. One to the Mediterra-ne-um."

He emphasized the syllables and fixed the Prince sternly with his eye. But experience of royal etiquette had taught command of facial expression, and the ordeal was successfully passed.

"I had thoughts of takin' Mesopotamy in the way," continued the monarch airily. "But somehow it didn't come off, owin' to contrary winds, an' Barney bein' tuk quare in his stummick, an' all the navigation bein' thrown on me own two hands. Oh! 'tis the mighty traveller I've been, sor, in me day. That's how I cum to the knowledge av laws an' governments, an' the right an' proper rulin' av me subjects. It's not ivery one as is given the right understandin' av that same knowledge; dade, an' that's throe. Ah!

## PRINCE CHARMING

I've had a hard time sure enough, and earned me rest by the sweat av me brow, an' perdishun to all traitors' I sez. But now, sor, before ye lave me kingdom it's only right an' proper ye should pay a visit to the National Emblem av the country. An' that's what I've been afther sayin' to Sheila there. An' she's willin' to take ye. It's away up beyant the bit av bogland, and sure there it grows three-leaved an' four-leaved, an' green an' swate as whin. Saint Patrick himself blessed it for us. An' if ye'll take a plant av it to Her Gracious Majesty in the other country wid me complayments an' best wishes, 'tis she will be the honoured an' proud lady that day. For 'tis only right that one soverin' shud be affayable an' purlite to anither, an' if she's got a Blue Garter, or a Victoryean Cross, lyin' idle in her juke-box, why she might be sendin' oue av thin to me as a token av goodwill. You'll mintion this maybe, sor?"

"I will," said the Prince affably. "Oh! certainly; you may rely on me."

"An' ye might give her ladyship a hint as to me gaynius for rulin', an' kaypin' the peace. Sure we niver have more than one faction fight a month in me territory, an' divil a sowl gits drunk save at funerals, an' we're too healthy here for many av

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*thim. Faix, an' I'm sorry narra one av me subjects  
wud do me the pleasure av dyin', wfile yer honour  
was here wid' us, so that we might have shown ye,  
a bit av divarsion. Maybe they wasn't aquil to it.  
Perhaps next time yer honour pays us a 'visit ye'll  
have better luck."*

The appearance of Sheila at the door cut short further interesting communications. She gave the ancient monarch directions as to his nourishment, and where to find the "purtaties" and buttermilk for his royal dinner.

Then she turned to the Prince.

"I am going to take you where the shamrock grows," she said. "It is a long way, and we must take our luncheon with us."

Silently he held out his hand for the basket she carried.

She wore a white serge gown, and on her lovely russet hair was set a scarlet fisher cap. She had never looked more lovely. His heart had never known so sharp a pain.

## CHAPTER XI

THE road wound up the hill side amidst a wonder of green leafage through which the sunshine filtered. Then turning sharply to the right it led into a miniature valley, emerald-hued, and shaded by larch and beech.

Beyond it, sloping skywards, was a steep rugged hill. •The girl pointed to it.

"There," she said, "is Mount Killeree, and beyond it is the patch of bogland where we get our fuel. It is on the other side of the mountain that the shamrock grows."

"It is a long way for you to walk," said the Prince.

"I am used to walking. I never get tired," she said. "I suppose in your country — the ladies—"

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"We will forget my country and the—ladies, for to-day, Sheila," said he. "I want to believe there is no country but this island; no Princess but you, no future beyond these promised hours. For to-day I will dream. There will be plenty to-morrows of awakening."

"For me as well," she breathed softly. Then, after a pause, she said. "Prince, do you think it is wrong to marry anyone for whom we don't care, simply because we have been promised to them?"

"You ask a difficult question," he answered. "Rank has obligations from which one cannot escape. I—" he paused. He could not speak the words that it was his duty to speak; not now—not to-day.

"You—" she said, and the sweet serious gaze made his heart thrill. "You will have to marry some day, won't you? All Kings and Princes have their consorts chosen for them. The Lady Agnes told me."

"I suppose I shall do as—others have done," he said huskily.

"You may be very happy," she said. "But I—I know I shall not. I would a thousand, thousand times sooner go into the Convent."

## PRINCE CHARMING

"But what question is there of your being forced to marry for duty, or reasons of State!" he exclaimed with sudden anger.

"My grandfather arranged all that long ago," she said simply.

"Your grandfather; that old imbecile—!"

The scarlet flush on her cheek checked him.

"He was wise and clever then," she said, in hurt accents. "And I owe him all my duty and my love. He has stood in place of parents to me from the time I was a little child. My mother was his daughter, but she disobeyed him and ran away, and for years he never knew what had become of her. Then, one day, she came back with me. I was only two years old. She died, and they say it broke his heart. He never told me her story, or her name."

"But all this does not explain why he should wish to marry you against your inclinations?"

"He is old and feeble, and he has nothing to leave me. And this—friend, was good to him. And between them it was agreed that I should marry him when he came back from America. And he has come back," she added.

Why did the Prince's thoughts fly suddenly to a steamer's deck; to a red-faced, noisy traveller, to the boasts and witticisms of a Patriot? He could not

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say, but the picture before his mind's eye was the picture of Patrick O'Farrell.

"From America; then he has been there. Is he rich?"

"Very rich. He wrote to grandfather to say he could buy the whole island if he wished."

The Prince laughed mirthlessly.

"And you? What of your own feelings and inclinations, Sheila?" he asked,

"Oh! I never thought about them," she said simply. "I knew I must do as I was bid. And it all looked far away, and there was no one else—"

His heart gave one quick throb. His hand caught her's and stayed her, and they looked each into the other's troubled face.

"I thought I would ask you—" she said unsteadily.

"Ask your own heart," he answered. "For I . . . I might not be a wise adviser, Sheila."

The lids dropped over the sudden sweet betrayal of her eyes. She did not speak.

"You do not—care—for this man?"

"I do not even know him," she said indifferently.

"But he is coming soon. To-morrow I think."

"To-morrow," said the Prince jealously. "And you will receive him as your promised husband?"

"I—I do not wish it. Perhaps he may not

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either. In the world beyond there must be so many 'better, wiser, worthier to be his wife.'

*"His wife! The wife of that boor!"*

He dropped her hands, and a spasm of disgust shook the even tones of his voice. The girl looked at him surprised.

"Do you know him that you speak so?" she asked.

"I can imagine what he is like. What most of your countrymen are like who return from America with pockets lined with dollars, and Republican effrontery grafted on their own national virtues," he said coldly. "Such a marriage would make you miserably unhappy, Sheila."

"Then I had better go into the Convent?" she said.

"To be made a caged nightingale, my Princess," he groaned. "Oh! Life, Fate, what tyrants you are! Sheila, if I were free, if I—dared—"

"He turned aside. "Let us walk on," he said. "And we will forget that a duty waits for me, and a husband for you. I cannot let anything cheat me out of my golden day."

"Ah! yes," she said, and the light came back to her eyes and face. "We will forget. It is so easy to be happy!"

With every innocent word she betrayed herself



## PRINCE CHARMING

and tempted him. But still he said, "I am strong. I will be silent. She—must not suffer."

They wandered on, pausing at last by a little stream rippling over brown pebbles with busy murmurs. Here they took their simple meal of bread and milk and fruit. On the island he had never touched wine. He half-smiled as he pictured the astonished face of Harold could he but see him.

With all his grace and ease and habits of the world, he yet could not but acknowledge the tact and charm and perfect delicacy of this untutored child. She treated him as her guest, served him, listened to him, with a reverent adoration that was eminently touching yet in no wise marred her own simple dignity. He yielded himself to her charm with less and less effort at defence.

"It is odd," he said to himself. "It is almost, in a sense humiliating, to think that I with all the world at my feet should only long to play King Cophetua to a fisher girl. Happy King! He had the courage to defy his world. Now, we only despise, while we obey it."

He watched her as she washed the humble delf in the little stream, laving her own face and hands in it as well, till her lovely skin glowed like a dew-washed rose.

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"Now," she said, "we will go and find the shamrocks."

"Tell me the history?" he asked, as they went on, leaving the basket at the foot of the tree till they should return.

And softly, and with a little pause here and there that she might watch the expression on his face, she told him Erinia's charming legend of how St. Patrick crossed the sea to preach to the savage islanders, and tell them the glorious truths of Christianity. How in order to illustrate the triune mystery of the Holy Trinity he had plucked a shamrock growing at his feet and shown to them the three leaves forming one perfect whole.

"And from that day," she said, "the shamrock has been acknowledged as the symbol of Faith, and the national emblem, and it will grow in no other country save this, though again and again people have tried to make it. But away from its own soil and showers and sunshine it dies, or spreads into a clumsy large leaved plant quite unlike the one we know."

"That is very strange," said the Prince thoughtfully. "Surely if I took it, and some of its own soil with it I could make it grow in my own land. I should like to do that," he added softly—"in memory of the island and of you, Sheila."

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She shook her head. "You may take whole plants of it, soil, roots, all, but it will not grow. It will die. Lady Agnes tried. You can ask her."

"I believe *you*. There is no need. Tell me some more about St. Patrick. Did he ever visit Crook-nagoora?"

"They say so. There is a rock divided by the sea from the land, away to the north of the island, and one cold winter's night the Saint came there and spent the hours till dawn in prayer. They show the print of his knees on the stone, and if one goes there and prays in the faith, he will be cured of any bodily ill."

"Would it cure a heart ache, Sheila," he asked softly.

"No doubt," she answered. "For its virtues are miraculous. But you must believe. You must be of the true faith."

"Alas!" he said regretfully. "I run a poor chance. Faiths and creeds are alike indifferent to me. Your priest here bans me as a heretic. In my land we tortured, killed, and imprisoned those of his faith on the same plea. They repaid the compliment with interest when their chance came. Look out on the world, read the histories of nations. It is only the history of bigoted and obdurate beliefs. Jew

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and Gentile, heathens and Christians, all creeds, faiths, and denominations do but quarrel in the name of the God they profess to worship. Sin reigns as it has always reigned. Cruelty, vice, impiety, blood-guiltiness, they rule the lives and souls of men despite all preaching and example. The world is full of wickedness, Sheila, and priestcraft is only another form of self-interest. Here, in this spot alone, have I ~~ever~~ found peace and purity and truth. Yet even here the serpent may come. There is no Eden without him.

"Ah! we are not all good here," she said. "Perhaps no better at heart than in the world you speak of. Even the good sisters confess that they have rebellious thoughts, sins of temper, greed, intolerance, selfishness. I sometimes think God made our hearts like that Tree in the Garden. Good and evil fruit growing on the same branches."

"And instead of pruning and discarding the evil, we gather it, and find it 'pleasant to the taste.'"

"Ah! no," she said softly. "At least not all, not many. I hope—," and she paused and looked at him with troubled serious eyes—"not *you*."

"Why should I be an exception?"

"Because you are great. Because you are set on high, and men look to you for example, and the

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world honours you. It is a great thing to be so near a throne."

"It is," he said, but his voice was utterly devoid of triumph. "But it is also a sad thing, a solemn thing. Somehow I never realised it so fully before—before I knew you," he added.

"Is that true, really?"

"I have said no word to you that is not true, Sheila. I would not have a shadow on my conscience that could dim the brightness of this memory."

The smile that touched her lips was tender as a child's, wistful as a loving woman's. "It is good to hear you say such words. I am only an ignorant girl, and beside the beautiful cultured women of your Court what must I seem? And yet—"

"Ah! yes. And yet? If I were not the Prince—"

"You cannot help yourself. Our duties come to us. We are not all born to live the same lives, or think the same thoughts."

He sighed. "God help us—no. And the best things of life are denied because the world sets that stamp of 'obligation' on our brow as its birth mark."

"The obligation of royalty," she said, "is to be great and strong, loyal to a people's trust, a nation's need. So I have read, and been taught, and believe."

"And what else? What of a heart craving simple

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human love; of feelings playing traitor to that obligation?"

"Human love is not—everything," she said. "Honour and conscience rank higher."

"They don't satisfy our heart-hunger," he said. "Yet God knows I am making my fight for honour and conscience both—this day."

His voice was low, harsh, broken, unlike itself. The hour of jest was over. The toils he was in had changed from fibre to steel. For the first time he had to fight instead of yield, and the struggle grew momentarily more painful.

• They had reached the brow of the hill at last. She pointed downwards. It seemed as if a shadow had fallen over the day's glory, and the valley below.

• A dreary place it looked—a wide waste where the brown water oozed through the boggy soil, and neither tree, nor shrub, nor human habitation relieved the dull monotony.

• They were silent for a moment, gazing at the mournful scene.

"It is there the shamrocks grow," she said at last. "Do you wish to go down?"

For all answer he stretched out his hand. She gave him her's.

"One cannot always be in the sunshine," she said

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and the sweetness of the smile that touched her lips changed to momentary sadness, and 'in that change it seemed to him his last defence broke and fell away as a frail reed may break.

With a little cry he caught her to his heart. "Oh! child, child," he cried. "What have we done that this Fate should come upon us?"

The tears rained from her eyes, those radiant eyes that had never known aught but smiles for him. She hid her face upon his breast.

Love gives to man and woman alike the power to read each other's heart in such a moment. He knew she loved him, and he knew that he must either be traitor to honour, or to joy. And she—she only felt the throb of his heart, the strong protecting clasp of his arms, the hoarse sob breaking the passion of his voice.

"Oh! God," he cried. "Am I mad, or a fool, or the wisest man on earth, for I love you, love you—*love you!*"

## CHAPTER XII

SHE drew herself away. In her face joy struggled with bewilderment, pride with shame.

"You cannot mean it," she said. "It is impossible! That I should love *you*, yourself, as I have loved your picture, your history, your memory, that is only natural, but that you ——"

"I told you a man was but a man, Sheila; as weak or strong as love, or a woman makes him."

"I would not have you weak," she said. "For then you would not be my Prince. Oh! it is all so strange, so wonderful! Like a dream, but sweeter than any dream."

He groaned aloud. "If it only were that," he said. "Alas! child, the awaking is at hand—a bitter one, a cruel one. Do you know what it is to place your fate in the hands of a man whom the world



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declares has denied himself nothing—nothing that pleased the whim or fancy of a moment. Who, not an hour ago, vowed to be strong and silent—and resist. See, how easily I have broken that vow; tell me—are you sorry?

“Yes,” she said, simply. “And yet I am proud. How can I help it? Why, if I never saw you again from this moment, I should have something to remember that would go with me through every hour of every day all the years that may come!”

“Something?” he echoed. “A word, the knowledge of a man’s weakness. It is not much, Sheila.”

“To you, perhaps not. You are not a woman.”

“Has love made you that, my innocent child?”

“Yes,” she said. “And yet love is not everything. If it were ——”

“Ah!” he said. “If it were I would ask, no fairer home than this island, no heaven but your pure eyes, no sweeter resting-place than your heart.”

“But it would not last,” she said, with a new strange gravity in her voice. “Something tells me that love cannot bridge the gulf between us. It is impossible. You forget, you are promised to one of

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your own rank—your equal in every way. It is your duty to return to her.”

“Minus a heart she never had,” he said bitterly.

“Honour binds even hearts,” she answered. “You will be glad some day that you did what was right.”

“And what of you?” he asked.

“God has let me meet you, and love you,” she said softly. “He must have known what would be; there must be some purpose in it. I cannot be quite unhappy even if I never see you again.”

“You will not ever see me again, Sheila,” he said, bitterly. “If you send me from you. Duty is a hard taskmaster and its fetters are strong. I shall not be free to come to you, my Island Princess, and what will comfort me?”

“God,” she said, “and duty, and the knowledge that you have done right.”

“Sweet platitudes! To think that even your guileless lips have learnt them, Sheila! Perhaps you will tutor your own heart as you bid me school mine? Perhaps you will become the patriot’s wife and ——”

He stopped. Her look shamed him. He knew then how deeply he had hurt, how grossly he had wronged her.

“I think,” she said gently, “you know I can never

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be any man's wife. Have I held your name and memory in honour so long, to dishonour them—*now?* ”

“Forgive me, Sheila,” he said. “You don't know how I have suffered, and struggled. I wanted to leave you as I found you—happy, free, at peace. But love cannot be commanded or controlled. It was too strong for me. And for your innocent heart what have I to offer? A man's passion that would wrong you, poison instead of the pure, clear daylight of your life! Peace of mind is the sweetest thing on earth. I have robbed you of it. The tears in your eyes are an endless reproach . . . God above! To think that a whim, a fancy, the chance of an idle word should breed such mischance!”

“I have told you not to reproach yourself. I am not unhappy. How could I be? It seems to me that no woman on earth could be more honoured, or more blessed.”

He looked at her, and his wonder and his reverence grew with every moment of the long silence that held life in a charmed pause. To be loved like this shamed him, and yet he would not have her care less. He passed in swift review all the passions and pleasures, desires and satieties of past years. He saw himself as the world professed to have seen

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him, no worse sinner than other men, but yet a sinner in face of this pure-souled saint.

"If I ever do anything worthier, better, it will be because of you!" he cried involuntarily.

She smiled; the smile of Erinia that is sunshine and tears, sparkle and shadow combined.

"Am I not richly paid enough, without that promise," she said. "If only you keep it."

"I swear I will."

"Then I too will make you one. Come."

Swiftly she led the way down the hillside, and into the dusky gloom of the little valley below.

He followed.

"Look!" she exclaimed, halting suddenly. She pointed to a dull green patch spreading far and wide over the moist soil.

"These," she said, "are shamrocks. What I want to say is this. Every year, on the eve of St. Patrick's Day, I will send you a root of it. For that day only I would ask you to wear one tiny spray in your coat in memory of me, and I, on my side, promise to wear the same. For that one day in the year we can think of this, that has been said, that we have foregone. We can meet *here* in our thoughts. Shall it be so?"

"It shall," he said solemnly. "I swear it by my faith in you, Sheila."

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She knelt and gathered one spray of the tiny three-leaved plant, and gave it him; and the man on whom all the science and wealth of floriculture had been lavished, whose heedless feet had crushed priceless blossoms, took that simple weed and 'kissed it with reverent lips.

"When you see *that*," she said gently, "you will think of my country and of me, will you not?"

"Of you—always; and for your sake of the land I have too long neglected and misjudged," he answered. "And more—I will wear the shamrock before the face of all my people, and teach them to honour your country and its Saint as your own people do."

"You will do *that*?" she cried breathlessly.

"For sake of you, and all you have taught me, Sheila."

She was silent, too deeply moved for speech, but she stretched her hands towards him, and all her full heart could not say was in her eloquent eyes.

Gently he took one hand, and drawing a ring from his finger placed it on hers. It was a heart shaped ruby set in diamonds.

"Wear it," he said, "in memory of to-day," and he closed the little hand upon the glittering jewel and held it for a moment to his heart.

It was the true betrothal of his life.

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"God for ever bless and guard you," he whispered solemnly.

Then they moved quietly away, and climbed the steep ascent once more. But when they reached the spot, where that brief love scene had been enacted they paused as if with one consent.

"We will say good-bye to each other and that dream," she whispered. "Then we must go back to life as it was before. And you must not reproach yourself, or think that any time will come when I shall be sorry that you spoke. For when I hear of you and read of you in days to come I shall say to myself, 'He once loved me,' and never queen will be prouder of her throne and power, than I of—this one memory."

"You shame my cowardice," he said, for brave as were the words, he saw the pain in her blanched young face, and knew that the look in her eyes would haunt his dying hour.

"Oh! child, why was I born to bring sorrow on your young head? Why can't I love and mate and live my life as other men—why—?"

She stretched out her hand and they stood face to face for one long moment, reading each other's souls; drinking that draught of sorrow, joy, pain, despair, that the Fates have brewed as the potion of Love.

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"You have taught me what all the world has not been able to teach," he said at last.

"And you have given me what all the world can never take away," she answered.

Then suddenly she bent one knee, and touched the hand she held with quivering lips.

"Good-bye, my Prince," she whispered.

"'Tis I should kneel to you," he said hoarsely, and drew her to his heart once more. Yet even in his madness and his grief restrained himself, and touched only her brow with lips grown reverent. But she tore herself from his arms, and flew swiftly as a bird flies down the hillside to the sheltering woods.

He did not follow.

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### CHAPTER XIII

THE Monarch of Crooknagoora had just partaken of his mid-day repast, and was devoting himself to royal meditation.

Above his head the sun shone warmly. Through the trees a soft breeze rustled. Around him his feathered subjects cackled and scratched and fought and strutted, just as their human compeers might have done. The King, watching them, chuckled, and drew inferences more or less tinged with octogenarian philosophy.

"Sure the ways av the craytures is ivery bit as wise an' as foolish as the ways av their betters," he chuckled. "Pushin' an' strivin' for the best bit av food, the warmest bit av sunshine, the notice of the pugnashious dominating ould rooster who's made himself king av the dungheap. Cacklin an' chortlin' an' struttin' as proud as paycocks when they've laid an



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egg accordin' to nature, or hatched a clutch av chickens in the broodin' sayson. Saints in glory! Why, what better are the crowin' cocks av a royal coort, the struttin' paycockin' faymales, the fighting quarrelsome, ministers and rulers than thim same cocks an' thins av me own yard!. Divil a ha'porth. Now there's Billasarius, me ram yonder, sure an' he's thinkin' hisself jist the grandest ould fighter in the whole island, an' no one to say him nay neither.

But sure the island isn't the whole wurld, an' his match might be aisey found av he'd throuble himself to look for it. An' that's the way wid Kings an' Princes. They listen to flatteries an' lies till they belave thimselves to be the wisest, greatest, most wonderful people in the whole creashun! An' thim as tells the lies chuckle an' laugh at thim as belaves thim. Sure, 'tis a mighty quare wurld whatsum-diver, an' I'm not the only man who's puzzled to think why it was iver made at all, at all. For 'tis little good it's done Him as made it, or thim as have to live in it. From first to last haven't they been cuttin' each other's throats, lyin' in each other's faces, wrongin' an' robbin' an' desayvin' each man his naybour, an' each woman her's. An' most av thim does it in the name av some great virtue, with which they label the deed as the mannyfacturers label the

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pickle bottles, One sez it's for counthry, an' anither for King or Queen, an' anither for Freedom, an' anither for Religion. But take thim all in all 'tis their own self is at the bottom av it, an' narra a patriot, nor priest, nor ruler, nor soldier, but's just cocking his eye round the corner to see where his best interest lies, an' what he's to get for his bargain. Now thin, Billasarius—why, what's ailin' ye? Sure, ye needn't be gettin' on the defensive, for sorra a sowl—”

He broke off abruptly.

A figure appeared at the western boundary of his garden plot. A stalwart figure, tweed-clad, rubicund of visage, a figure that brought some memory of past days along with it, and threw the ancient ruler into a comatose state of mind by stress of endeavour at unravelling a skein of memory entangled in the meshes of the past.

Well, Johnny, me bhoy?” cried the stranger, familiarly. “And how's yourself—every bit of you? And how's the wurld bin treatin' you all these years? How! Why! Whurra! Whist! ye baste! What's that yer after?”

For Billisarius had assumed his usual interrogative attitude, and his horns were uncomfortably near the speaker.

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"Call the ould divil off, Johnny. Sure an' ye haven't forgotten me? Pathrick O'Farrel, as is yer own promised grandson-in-law come back from Ameriky."

"O'Farrel!" murmured the Monarch, drowsily. "Is it nilly yerself, Pat, me bhoy? Yez very welcome. Come along in wid ye. Sure the dacint animal won't be hurtin' ye. He has a memory for old friends."

Billisarius had—and a memory too for old blows, and kicks, and such like attentions as had been bestowed on him by the patriot in days preceding his visit to the Land of Freedom.

It pleased him therefore to play the part of King's Bodyguard for some time longer. The ancient Monarch watched the playful skirmishing with that exquisite enjoyment of trifles a great mind sometimes experiences. The patriot's skips, and feints, and lunges, the determined manner in which, Billisarius defended the outposts of the citadel, the rising anger of the attacking party, and the imperturbable coolness of the defending, all made up an impromptu comedy that was infinitely entertaining. However, the chuckles of the Monarch and the threatening "baa's" of Billisarius had anything but a soothing effect upon the temper of the

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patriot, and his language grew stronger, and more forcible every moment.

“Why can’t ye call him off, ye ould fool, instead of sitting there like an image av stone. Isn’t yer *shillelagh* handy? It used to be, as this ould vagabone knows. Am I to be kept out here settin’ to partners to his vaygaries the whole blessed day, bad cess to him?”

The King ceased chuckling, and stretched out a trembling hand for his *shillelagh*.

Sheila generally placed it beside his chair when she left him alone, knowing by experience that Billisarius was apt to take advantage of his royal master’s helplessness.

A new demonstration on the part of his aggressor brought the animal within appreciable distance of the monarch’s arm.

Billisarius resigned the defence of the citadel immediately, and retired to meditate on the ingratitude of sovereigns, as other court officials have had occasion to do.

O’Farrel, hot and fiery-looking, and in mood to match his appearance, at last entered the royal precincts, and seated himself on the bench.

“In the name av all that’s wonderful, what makes ye keep that ould horned devil still?” he inquired.

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"I thought ye'd have had him shot, drawn, and quartered long ago!"

"Shot is it? Me faithful sarvint an' playmate. Let me catch inyone doin' him a single ha'porth a' harm, an' I'll crop the two ears off his head to tache him the thru' manin' av a joke," cried the irate king.

"He's a vile, aggressive, ould brute," muttered the Patriot. "But that's enough of him. The day's too hot for quarrelin', Johnny. Where's a dhrop av drink handy, an' where's the gurl?"

"Dhrink!" said the 'monarch. "Sure, an' 'tis little av that I'm afther havin' these bad times. A sup av milk, or a glass av water, that's what she gives me. An' she's away wid herself the whole blessed day; gone off wid the tourist gintleman from Britain there beyant. Oh! the greatest av friends, an' a quiet, nice spoken young man he is, wid a mind for a joke, an' a thru' apprayciation 'av me royal state an' condition."

"Who is he?" demanded O'Farrel, jealously.

"Who—" repeated the ancient ruler, gazing 'somewhat vacantly around. "They didn't alter the colour av yer hair across the say, Pat," he added irrelevantly.

"Never mind me hair. It covers me head, an'

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that's what hair's mint for. Who's this young man ye spoke av, an' why do ye let Sheila be off wanderin' here an' there wid him? That's a fine sort av way to guard the gurl I've come home to make me wife!"

"Yer wife, Pat? Is that so, now?"

"Is that so, ye ould vagabone! Didn't we arrange it all before I left the country? And I've made me fortune as I sed I wud, an' here I am, ready an' willin' to marry her as soon as the priest sez the wurrds. An' I'll tell ye what, Johnny, I'll pull down this ould shanty av yours, an' build a proper house instead av it; stone an' brick, for all the wurrl'd like the gintry over yonder. An' she shall have rale paper on the walls, an' mahogany furniture av the best from Dublin, an' a pianno-forte to play on, an' iverything a rale lady has. What d'ye say to that, Johnny?"

"It's a fine bit av promosing. But the gurl has a will an' a mind ay her own, Pat, an' the Sisters at the Convent yonder, they've made quite the lady av her. Her very spache is different. She hasn't the Irish at all now, an' the cleverness—Oh! She's a jewel of a gurl, an' fit for a king to marry. It's a good thing maybe ye can give her a fine downsittin' for divil a wurrd av fayvour would any man get from her that cudn't."

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The Patriot's brow grew dark. "What the mischief possessed you to let the gurl be brought up like that!" he exclaimed angrily.

The old man's eyes clouded. He gazed from side to side. The long strain on his attention had wearied him.

"I'll be wishin' ye goodnight now, Pat," he murmured. His head sank back on the cushion of his chair, and he fell asleep.

O'Farrel looked at the old worn face, the feeble frame, and a momentary softness came into his eyes.

"I wonder av it's thrue what he's been sayin," he thought. "I wonder if the gurl is really changed? She was only a baby-child whin I saw her last, but the beauty was in her even thin. I wish she was here. Maybe I'd meet her if I was to walk a bit. I wonder which way she took?"

He rose and looked about, but tree and sky and hedge gave no clue. He sauntered down to the low wooden gate and leaned his elbows upon it. The air was still, and full of drowsy warmth. The semi-circle of hills were dusk as shadows against the sky. Cattle were browsing or basking in patches of pasture, where the trees gave welcome shade. Far below, the little lake lay in jewel-like radiance.

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But it all looked small and insignificant to the travelled eyes of the patriot. He had grown used to Nature on a large scale. Huge expanse, marvellous towns, wide rushing rivers, foaming cataracts, mountains towering skywards. This miniature island was like a pretty toy after the country he had left. It seemed wonderful to him now that people could live out their lives there in perfect content. A rural existence had no charm for him. He longed for the stir and strife of cities, the excitement of rivalry, the fever of money-getting.

"I'll take her over the seas," he thought to himself. "This place is altogether too peaceful to suit the likes of me any longer. Why—who's the colleen?"

A girl had just come out from the woods as he spoke, and was walking slowly along the hot stony road. Her head was bent, her eyes on the ground. She moved languidly as if tired, or dispirited.

Straight towards him she came, and his wondering eyes took in the grace of her figure, the flutter of her white dress, the scarlet cap set on the lovely head.

"It's not—sure it niver can be—Sheila!" he muttered. "Why she looks the lady born, ivery inch av her."

She was close now and lifted her head and saw him leaning there over the gate. She stood quite still;



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her face grew as white as her gown. Her eyes asked who he was, but involuntarily her lips set themselves in mute disgust as he spoke her name.

"Well, 'tis you've grown the rale beauty, my gurl," he said complacently. "If it wasn't for the hair, an' thim two eyes of yours which are jist the same as whin I said goodbye to ye I'd niver have known ye. Come along in, an' tell me how's all wid ye, an' that yer glad to have yer ould friend back once more! What are you starin' that queer way for? 'Tis a sorry welcome after all these years, an' whin I've brought a fortune back wid me to lay at yer feet."

The sound of his coarse voice, the sight of his coarse face with its aureole of fiery hair affected the girl with inexpressible disgust. After the delicate flattery, the courtesies and attentions of her Prince Charming, this contrast was too violent.

She shrank back as he opened the gate, and extended his arms in welcome.

"Are you—really—Patrick O'Farrel?" she asked faintly.

"Am I? . . . Sure an' av coofse I am. Who else would I be?" he asked mockingly. "An' what's the rayson for yer lookin' so shy? Is that the way yer trating ould friends since ye've been larnin' thim

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fine-lady mincing ways an' thricks. 'Indade thin it's a pity yer gran'father didn't lave ye alone, that it is."

"I—of course I am glad to see you back, well and safe," she faltered. "But I was so surprised, it is such a long time—"

"It is that," he answered, somewhat mollified. "An' ye were but a child wid yer feet bawp, an' yer petticoats above yer knees, my colleen *dhé*. Sure an' can't ye git a bit more home-like wid me? 'Tis a perfect Rippan-Winkle I'm feelin' back here, wid ye all looking so strange, an' the whole place aslape, or grown blue-mouldy for want of a fight in it."

He had taken her reluctant hands in both his own, but she shrank so visibly from any less formal greeting that he felt repelled.

"Have you seen grandfather?" she asked hurriedly, as she led the way to the cabin door.

"I have, an' talked wid him an hour or more. He's slapin' yonder for all the wurld like a year old child in its mother's arms."

"Can I get you anything; tea or food? I'm afraid there's not much in the house . . . but . . ."

"Sure an' it's starvin' ye all are here," he answered brutally. "Divil a bit av a dacint meal I've had anywhere. Why an ye only *saw* a breakfast over there in Ameriky ye'd be growin fat on the sight

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av it. Is there'sich a thing as a dhrop av whiskey to wet me lips wid? The ould man cud'nt tell, so I thought maybe ye'd taken the keys av the cellar along wid ye!"

"We have no spirits here," answered Sheila. "Only milk, or I can make you a cup of tea, if you like."

"Well, I've not much fancy for it. But it's not purt to be grumblin'. An' that reminds me, where've ye been all the day, gurl? It's not too kind ye are to the poor ould man beyant, lavin' him to that haythin animal, an' niver bite nor sup to his lips since the mornin'."

"That's not true," said the girl angrily. "He had his usual breakfast, and I left the mid-day meal."

"Mid-day meal, mimicked the Patriot. "Oh! thim's the fine ways av us! Glory be to God! It's "lunshon" I suppose yer manin' ?—an' late dinners *aller-roose*, an' sich like? Ye'll kindly excuse me not bringin' me dress clothes wid me. I left them at the Hotel—the other side av the water, not expectin' to find meself in sich grand company."

Sheila coloured to her temples.

"I will bring you some tea out hère," she said haughtily. "I see grandfather is awake now."

## CHAPTER XIV

As Sheikh's figure disappeared the Prince threw himself down on the soft grass.

"I have done wrong," he said to himself. "And I cannot undo it. What use to say other men might have done worse. Have taken herself as well as her love, and left her—ruined. It does not excuse me in my own eyes. It never will."

He lay face downwards, resting on his folded arms, shutting out the blue of sky and gold of sunshine, his heart aching as it had never ached, and all the pleasant ease of life turned to bitterness.

For one long hour he lay thus immovable, communing with his own soul and sparing himself in no way as he passed in review the various sins and follies of his life. His manhood had falsified every ideal of his youth; he had seen the fair flowers of truth and faith and honour die in the hot arid atmosphere of the

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world. He knew himself envied, admired, beloved, and yet face to face with that naked soul-self which in some hour of existence every man must meet, he felt that there was nothing to envy, nothing to admire, and very little to love.

He could not say why this sense of failure had suddenly overwhelmed him. But to his heart's core he felt it. Power, and possession, and authority, mocked at him afar off. For what purpose had he used them? To what end had they brought his life?

He was intelligent enough to be dissatisfied with that life, and wise enough to recognize the follies that had misruled it. But in all its years he had never known discontent so great, weariness so intense, and pain so sharp, as its review left with him now.

A shock both sharp and significant had changed him from a purposeless idler to a man with some resolution and some strength. Whatever heroism or romance lay dormant in his character had been aroused by Sheila's worshipping belief in both. Whatever of ill, or selfishness, or indolence, had been checked by her gentle counsels.

The experience had not been altogether pleasant.

A pilgrimage of joy had suddenly ended at a shrine of pain. He found a mortuary chapel of lifeless bones, dust, vanities! Found it now in a sudden

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loneliness, cold, as death itself. "You have made others suffer; it is right you should do the same," murmured an accusing voice at the door of his soul. "No one can evade retribution—always."

• He made no attempt to evade it now. He felt as if strength and will had failed utterly in this dark hour. When it was over, when he lifted his head and looked up at the blue arch of Erinia's sky, it seemed to him that he would never again be the same man who had laughed back at that sky only a few brief weeks before. In those weeks he had let life go by with sublime indifference, had troubled himself in no way as to what was being said or done during his absence. Now he must take it up again, praying only forgiveness for a love that would not let him forget.

A girl's gentle lips had told him his duty: had pointed to where honour lay. She had been stronger in her suffering than he in his remorse, and for her sake he must not fail her.

"But it will be hard to go . . . hard to leave her," he groaned aloud, as he staggered to his feet, and stood for a moment looking round the "Enchanted Island," as he had called it. Yet go he must and that soon—at once. The less delay, the better for both, seeing how weak are human hearts in the fire

## PRINCE CHARMING

of temptation. He had one more battle to fight, one more ordeal to face, and then—then he would go back to his own land, to duty, to his affianced wife, to all the poor and petty squabbles, intrigues, and etiquette of a Court that prided itself on perfect rectitude and propriety.

"I wish it was over," he told himself, overwhelmed by a sudden sense of misery and hopelessness. "And I pray Agnes may never—guess."

. . . . .  
"Good Heavens! surely I know that voice!"

The Prince paused before the entrance to the Palace of Crooknagoora, arrested by strident far-reaching tones.

It was evening. The sky was full of pearly shadows. Twilight was melting into dusk, and the first star showed against a background of deepening violet.

That strange voice broke harshly on the dreamy peace. Another moment, and it was challenging the visitor and demanding his business.

The Prince walked up the familiar path, and stood face to face with the illustrious personage he had met on the boat coming over to Erinia. The surprise was mutually unpleasant.

"Tare an' ounds, if it isn't the furrin traveller who

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was comin' over to make notes av the counthry an' the people, for thim newspapers!" exclaimed O'Farrel. "And how in the name av wonder did ye make yer way over here to Crooknagoora?"

"By boat," said the Prince quietly.

"Well, I'm not supposin' ye walked the say like Saint Peter av blessid memory! An' now ye are here, what's yer opinion av the counthry? Wasn't it thrue, iviry wurd I tould ye? An' wasn't there a King, though he's a trifle weak in the way av a Coort owin' to hard times, and yer own parliayment yonder."

"You were quite right in your description," said the Prince gravely. He was wondering where Sheila was; wondering too, with a strange feeling of jealous antagonism, if it could be possible for her to marry this terrible individual.

"There's for ye now!" exclaimed the Patriot, turning to the ancient monarch. "Didn't I blow yer trumpet well for ye? Sure an' this gintleman will carry the fame av ye, an' av Crooknagoora over to his own counthry, an' it's princes, an' it's lords, an' maybe the Queen her royal self as will be comin' to visit ye before long. Oh! the powerful fine Ruler he's been, sor, in this day, an' let me hear iny man say to the contrary, an' meself, Pathrick O'Farrel,



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will make him swallow the lie in less time than it tak him to spake it!"

"You are very—patriotic, Mr. O'Farrel," observed the Prince.

"It's me pride, sor, an' me boast, an' that av ivery true-born Irishman that iver drew breath on his native-soil, or off it. An' now, tell me what ye've seen in yer travels. It's a book at least ye'll be writin' to tell the wurld av the wonderful place it is, an' the wonderful people we are. Ye've seen the Coort? Av coorse the pallus isn't a very grand affair, but I tould ye I was comin' over to arrange the construction av a new one for His Royalty yonder, an' already I've been showin' himself the plans."

"'Deed an' that's a lie, Pat O'Farrel," said the monarch calmly.

"Well, they're in me trunk at the presint moment. An' sure ye ould *omadhaun*, ye wouldn't be denyin' that I've described to a door post, the palashul edyfice I'm goin' to build here on purpose for ye—and Sheila."

"Sheila!" the Prince murmured involuntarily.

"The Princess; and me own promised wife. Av coorse ye've made her acquaintance?"

"Of course," said the Prince, repressing a strong

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inclination to pitch the intruder into the adjoining fowl-run, and the mercies of Billisarius.

"'Tis she's grown the fine gurl, God bless her!" said the Patriot complacently. "An' whin I've shown her a bit av life, and the wurril beyant the broad Atlantic, she'll maybe waken up a bit. Mighty quiet an' silent-like she is at presint, but sure she's young an' she'll mend av that, or I'm no judge av wimmin! But to continue me cat-ee-gory. Have ye seen a faction-fight, sor?"

"No."

"A funeral thin, wid a wake to antecede it?"

"No."

"A horse race or a cattle fair?"

"No."

"Glory be! What a waste av time! Then—" sinking his voice impressively. "Niver tell me ye haven't seen a—station?"

"A railway station? Oh! yes—of course."

"Railway station be—well, no matter, it's only showin' yer ignorance ye are. I mean a raal station. *Oxis, Doxis, Glorioxis!* It's av two sorts. The wan sort is whin the people goes to a particular place on a pilgrimage excursion, an' sez their prayers an' penitences there by way av doin' their sowsls good, an' gettin' rid av inconvaynient sins. The other,

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an' sure 'tis held on this same island, or *vass*, whin I was livin' here, is that the praste an' his curate comes to some house or cabin, (they're not particular,) in order to give them as is niglectful an' disobaydient a chance av comin' to *their duty*. By which term we mane confession. A thing ye heretics know nothing about. It's a fine sight. Sure ye'll be sorry ye've missed it, an' a power av either things. But the station—what wid the processhuit, an' the banners, an' the holy images, an' the incense, an' the men an' wimmin an' children followin'—it's illigant intirely! To miss the likes av that! Maybe then ye don't know the manin' av 'Cead mille u failtha?'"

"I . . . think it's something about 'welcome'," said the Prince wearily.

"Not sich a bad guess for ye. I'll be bound though, ye don't know what the *Confiteor* is?"

"No. I confess I never heard of it."

"I thought so," said the patriot triumphantly. "Ye've been goin' about the country wid blind eyes an' deaf ears, an niver done yerself a ha'porth av good by comin' to it at all, at all. Ah! 'tis Father M'Quirk ye'd need, to be puttin ye through yer catechism. For av ye write av a counthry widout a thrue an' complate knowledge av its religion, its

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rule, and its customs, sure ye don't write the truth av it at all!"

"But I've no intention of writing anything about the country, I assure you."

"That's what ye all say, an' yet ye do it. Johnny, is it slapin' ye are agin, an' I puttin' the travellin' gintleman through his instructions."

"Did ye say a dhrop more av the whiskey, Pat?" murmured the ancient Monarch feebly. "Sure—it won't go wrong wid me, inyway. Many's the long day since a taste av it passed me lips."

"I thought as much whin I brought ye a prisint av a bottle. But even that's not the same as it was in the ould times. Do you mind, Johnny, av the sly little keg that wud come yer way, an' niver saw water? Will ye join us, sor?"

"No, thank you," said Prince Charming, wondering why he could not ask for Sheila; why Sheila never came? Surely she must have heard his voice, if she were anywhere about the place.

The patriot produced a bottle from underneath the bench, and helped himself liberally before administering a dose of the same cordial to the ancient Monarch.

"It's yer own loss, sor," he said, smacking his lips. "An' one av our national virtues, the apprayciation,

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*I mane.* Fit to rank with the bay-attitudes\* any day. An' talkin' av that same, wud yer travellership like to hear the sivin great principles for the proper rulin' av life an' honour av the Church? Do ye remember, Johnny?"

"I do," chuckled the Ancient one. "And sorra a bit av comfort they iver brought me own sowl. Which is the way they run, Pat?"

The patriot refreshed himself with another "sup," as he called it, cleared his throat and commenced to recite in almost clerical fashion, the following list:

"1st. Sundays and holidays mass thou shalt hear.

"2nd. All holy days sanctificate through the year.

"3rd. Lent, Ember days, and Virgins, thou shalt be certain to fast.

"4th. Fridays and Saturdays, flesh thou shalt not taste.

"5th.—

"What the divil's the fifth, Johnny? Something about confession I know."

"Confess yer sins—" suggested the Monarch.

"Ah! there's for ye—

"5th. Confess your sins at least once a year.

"No, ye ould sinner, that's the sixth I'm after

\* Beatitudes.

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sayin'. This is the way av it. Now don't ye be interrupting me agin.

"5th. In Lent and Advent Nuptial feasts gallantly forbear.

"6th. Confess your sins dacintly once a year.

"7th. Resave yer God at Confesshun—about Great Easter Day.

"8th. (An' most important.) To Church and clargy neglict not tides (tithes) to pay."

"There's for ye, sor. An' av in thim sevin maxims there's not the whole duty av man contained—clargy and laity too—well, Ireland's not the counthry I take her for."

"There's a great deal in them, certainly," said the Prince, somewhat weary of this lengthened colloquy.

"But I must really be wishing you good evening. I came here to bid good-bye to Mr.—to His Majesty, and his grand-daughter. I am leaving the island to-morrow."

"Is that the way? Well, sor, I make no doubt ye'll niver mate its equal agin in point av beauty, economy, an' self-government, not to mintion the honour av being recayved so friendly-like in the royal household. I shouldn't be surprised to hear it was the first time ye'd ever visited a pallus, or been treated on terms av equality by a raal king?"

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"It is not, strictly speaking,—the first time," said the Prince gravely. "But I sincerely hope it will not be the last."

"I wudn't be countin' too much on me luck," said the patriot gloomily. "Things will go a bit contrary sometimes, sor. Here, wake up, Johnny. The gintleman's waitin' to wish ye good evening."

"Thank ye kindly, sor," said the old man, extending a wrinkled hand with dignified condescension. "An' very plazed I've been to make yer acquaintance. Ye won't be forgettin' the messages to Her Ladyship if ye iver happen to come across her?"

"I will not forget—anything," said the Prince, gently.

"An' espeshully about that Garter I've heard tell av," continued the ancient monarch. "I'd take it very kindly av she'd think av me the next time she finds a spare one lyin' anywheres. You'll mintion that maybe?"

"I certainly will. May I ask you to convey my farewell to your grand-daughter. I'm sorry not to have seen her. Every good fortune attend you both. I shall never forget my visit to you, nor what it has taught me."

The patriot wondered a little at those grave, almost solemn tones; he thought too, that some of

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the warmth and brightness had gone out of the frank handsome face, or was it the moonlight made it look so pale?

"Goodbye, an' good luck to ye thin," he said, rising to his feet somewhat unsteadily. "Maybe ye'll be givin' us a look in agin some day whin the new Royal Pallus is built, an' Sheila an' I are livin' there as man an' wife?"

The Prince turned abruptly away. For once he dared not trust himself to speak.



## CHAPTER XV

IN her little room within, Sheila had been kneeling during this colloquy, trying to shut out the hoarse, loud tones of the patriot, and to cheat her senses of the dear pleasure of that other voice.

She had said farewell to her Prince and hero; she could not summon courage to face the ordeal of another meeting.

The wonderful words he had said to her, the memory of that look in his eyes when that passionate "I love you, love you, *love* you," broke like a storm-wave over the maiden peace of her young heart, all these lived again and again before her. It seemed a wild, impossible dream, that scene on the hill-side—a dream that had glorified its hour of dreaming, transfigured life, and now left her to pay the penalty of its brief delight.

She felt afraid of him as she thought of it.

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Abashed and humbled at her own poor state and unworthiness. It had been all such pretty fooling at first. So sweet a jest to have him call her "Princess," and speak of the island as enchanted; but gradually, as the truth of his identity had stolen upon her, she had known such things must end. How disastrous that ending might be, she had never recognized till this morning.

Now—all was over.

He would return to his own land. They would never meet again. They never *must* she told herself. For it is not in human power to battle always against the tempting of heart and nature; to string itself up to heroism, and force from its side the thing it loves and covets most.

She had done this, and he had done it also; but she felt the agony of that parting in every fibre of her frame. She knew that if she went out now and stood with him in the moonlight, and felt the clasp of his hand, and saw that look in his loving eyes, she would never find strength to send him from her. She would only long to throw herself at his feet crying, "Do with me as you will, only let me love you."

Would those voices never cease? Was he lingering there in the hope that she would appear? She

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pressed her hands over her ears, and hid her face against the knitted coverlet of her bed.

Oh! the loneliness and misery of life to come. Of days, and weeks, and years, perhaps, that would be blank and desolate since no sign or word must bridge the silence between them. The tears rained down her cheeks, a storm of sobs tore her very heart asunder.

Outside, so near, and yet so widely severed from her, she knew he stood, and spoke, and perhaps longed for her—yet still her resolve kept her back.

He was going at last. His voice reached her despite her endeavour to close every sense to its charm. Her hands fell to her sides, and she lifted her head, and with all her soul listened.

How clearly the tranquil even tones fell on the still night air—“*I will not forget anything.*”

A shiver shook her from head to foot. She staggered up, and stood leaning against the little wooden bed, trembling like a leaf.

Again his voice rang out, like music against the braying discord of that other, the voice of the man who claimed her as wife to be.

“*I shall never forget my visit here, or what it has taught me.*”

Ah! he was going now. She heard the step, the creak of the old wooden gate.

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Then silence.

The room grew dark about her. Suddenly with a faint cry she fell across the bed, and lay there, still and cold as death.

When at last consciousness returned, she heard her name being loudly called.

The voice was the patriot's.

She roused herself, feeling dizzy and sick, and opening her door went out into the little kitchen.

"What do you want?" she answered back.

"Here, come along out wid ye, an' see what's ailin' the ould man," cried O'Farrel. "Divil take me av I can rouse him, he's that sound in his slape."

With an effort she collected her energies, and went out to the doorway. Her grandfather lay back in his chair, the moonlight falling on his white face and silvery hair. His eyes were closed, his hands still clasped the arms of his old wicker seat. A great peace and calm seemed to have fallen on the familiar face and figure. The girl bent over him.

"Grandfather," she said, softly. Then, a little louder. "Grandfather! it's time to go to bed."

"'Tis a sound slape, isn't it?" said the patriot uneasily. "Give him a bit av a shake to rouse him, gurl."

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But Sheila only laid her hand on the wrinkled one that clasped the chair. It was strangely cold and nerveless.

"He can't hear, or feel!" she cried in sudden terror. "What is it?"

O'Farrel bent more closely over the old worn frame, gently raised the closed lids, laid his hand on the quiet heart. No light in the eyes, no pulse in the heart?

The ancient monarch was indeed sound asleep. He had laid down rule and sceptre once for all, and was taking a well-earned rest, in some fairer Kingdom perchance than this island home he had at last forsaken.

Sheila had never looked on death before. But death in this guise had no terror. Only a great peace and a great awe.

She saw O'Farrel lift the frail old figure in his arms and carry it within. As she turned to follow a strange cry broke the stillness of the night air. She shuddered and grew very white. It was the plaintive protesting bleat of Billisarius, as he stood with drooped head, beyond the fence, watching his master's unfamiliar departure.

For the first time in their life together that master

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returned no answer to the entreaty, gave no cheery "goodnight" to his faithful servitor and attendant.

To Billisarius as to other wonderers and philosophers on this troubled globe, the "times seemed out of joint."

Throughout that night Sheila sat beside the dead monarch, watching with wondering reverent eyes the placid face, which wore a new kingliness now. Two candles burnt at his head, a rosary lay on his breast. The frock or habit, laid by for such occasions, clothed his quiet form in decent fashion. O'Farrel had done all, and then left the girl to watch beside the body, while he took a snatch of sleep stretched before the turf fire.

That night was an epoch in the girl's life. She was face to face with the Great Mystery. The Mystery of Life's End—a greater, a stranger, a more terrifying one than its beginning.

All the teaching of her Church, the memory of pious lives in that quiet retreat on the hill-side came back to her. The world and its passions, and vanities faded into insignificance.

A little joy, a little woe, and then—*this*. The end of all. For when the curtain fell none could raise it. All the old familiar friendly things were powerless to claim word, or notice, or remembrance, so it seemed.

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On either side a great Gulf stood the living and the dead. Could prayer or penance, anguish or desire bridge that Gulf, win one sign that there was common meeting-ground beyond?

She felt the impossibility. A dead weight of sorrow lay upon her heart, and the to-morrows showed only hopelessness.

"He was all I had, and he has left me!" she cried, as she knelt beside that quiet figure. "Oh! if he had only taken me also!"

For a first love is in some sense also a first idolatry, and with its loss, or its failure, the spring of life seems broken. The world grows empty and lonely, and even death looks kinder than the desolate years to come!

When the morning broke she was still kneeling there, murmuring the prayers that habit had made familiar. Her limbs felt stiff and numbed. A great sorrow and a great fear oppressed her. For she was quite alone and quite unprotected now.

She wondered what would happen?

Marry this man she could not bring herself to do. But the only resource was to enter the Convent, supposing the Sisters would accept her. She had no money to bring them, but she was clever and capable and would be of much use. They all loved her, but

## PRINCE CHARMING

had she the right to call disappointment and a wounded heart a vocation for the Holy Life? They had taught her its demands and exactions. She felt nothing but weariness of the world, and the burden of existence.

While these perplexities held her troubled mind the patriot yawned and woke. The sight of that odious face, those tumbled fiery locks, the whole rough, uncouth appearance of the man affected Sheila with a sense of physical disgust.

"I cannot do *that*," she thought. "Whatever comes, whatever threatens, I cannot marry him. I would sooner die!"



## CHAPTER XVI

UNDER the shade of the pine trees in the Friedrich Allée the Lady Agnes walked and talked with a crowd of admiring courtiers, among whom were Counsellor Fritz and the Prince Harold.

She was in radiant spirits. Her eyes were bright, and her complexion and toilette even more perfect than she usually arranged they should be. Her raillery and wit hit right and left; winged shafts that she used for her own sport, or the discomfiture of her rivals.

"And so your Royal Highness's reign is over," she was saying. "A few hours, and you must sign your abdication."

"That does not trouble me," said the Prince Harold, but his tone was somewhat sulky, and his eyes turned to where a lady sat under the trees, with a little crowd of people hovering around her.

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A young lady, with a somewhat cold and stately air; dressed very simply but with that distinguished "something" about her look, manner, bearing, that is so hard to describe, so impossible to imitate.

"She found you out?" said Lady Agnes, mischievously.

"I never attempted to deceive her," he answered

"Oh! I think you did; just for one little hour; confess. Were the sixty minutes worth the—sacrifice."

"I fail to see where the sacrifice comes in," said the Prince.

"I suppose she has heard the news?" continued Lady Agnes. "Has she said anything?"

"Not a word,"

"You will all go to meet him, of course?"

"I—shall not," said Prince Harold. "It would be rather absurd."

"I don't see that. The mistake of other people needn't trouble either of you."

"I am leaving here—myself," he explained.

"Oh! how foolish! I mean surely there is no necessity."

"There is the necessity of sparing the Princess a little—awkwardness."

"She won't mind. She is too good natured, isn't

## PRINCE CHARMING

she, Count? I hardly suppose her curiosity is as great as my own. Three weeks of absolute, impenetrable silence! What *has* he been doing?"

"How long would it take to really explore the country?" asked the Counsellor.

"Oh! for his purpose, a week would suffice. But it's his silence more than his absence that surprises me. It is the first time—"

She paused abruptly, and a less perfect complexion might have betrayed the flush of embarrassment. The Lady Agnes, however, had the cleverest maid in London.

"I know," said the Counsellor meaningly. "To myself also it has happened—for the first time. I ask myself what absorbing interest could have deprived us of his attention."

"I can think of none," she replied.

"He has probably fallen in love with an Erinian maiden," said Prince Harold. "One has heard of their beauty."

The Lady Agnes smiled. Had she not sent him to Crooknagoora and a Convent. "They may be beautiful," she said. "But they are not his style."

"Perhaps they possess wit, humour, *esprit*. That is preferable to beauty."

"I never met any who possessed anything but red

## PRINCE CHARMING

hair, large appetites, and a brogue you could cut with a knife," said Lady Agnes cruelly.

The others laughed.

"Then they cannot be the attraction?"

"What is a brogue?" asked Count Fritz.

"Something bad, to hear and impossible to describe. It is peculiar to the country."

"Still," persisted Prince Harold, "love may have come his way. He is so full of sentiment."

Lady Agnes smiled. "You credit him with your own virtues," she said. "But whatever has come his way, is left behind. You see he returns."

"Will the Princess ask questions, do you think?" said the Counsellor.

"Hardly. She has been well brought up."

Prince Harold smiled. "How your education must have been neglected, Lady Agnes."

"It was. In the whole course of my youth I never remember being called a 'good girl.'"

"They are usually objectionable," observed Prince Harold. "You have had an escape."

"Why don't you join the Princess?" asked Lady Agnes. "She looks quite forlorn, and the Grand Duchess seems in a worse temper than usual. What has ruffled her serenity?"

"They gave her the wrong glass at the spring this

## PRINCE CHARMING

morning. And she lost fifty francs at cards last night."

"Fifty! she won't smile for a week, even if she wins them back. Why are rich people so mean?"

"She is not rich," said Count Fritz, who knew the incomes and liabilities of most crowned heads, and many an uncrowned one. "And she has so many plain unmarried daughters, you know."

"I wonder why she is chaperoning the Princess?" mused Prince Harold.

"Because she can conjugate the verb *s'effacer* and that suits her serene Highness—at present. You should know that, Monsieur."

He looked at her.

"Do me justice for once. My posit only trying, but peculiar. If you had seen her disappointment—"

"I confess I should like to have done so. Was she cross? Be candid and tell me."

"She was dignified," he said, "and we both laid the blame on the newspapers."

"And didn't she ask where your Highness's cousin really was?"

"No. I think she imagines he is in Scotland. And she has very vague ideas of Scotland as a place where the inhabitants go about bare-legged, and never shave, and where it always rains."

## PRINCE CHARMING

"I wonder if he will be much changed," murmured the Lady Agnes irrelevantly.

"He? Oh! Victor, you mean? Why should he? He does mention incidentally that he has lost a stone in weight."

"What, in three weeks? He really must have taken exercise, then?"

"It seems so. I can't imagine why he was so alarmed at a little extra weight. No one would say he was—"

"Oh! no," said Lady Agnes. "They would only say he was *not*, and think—the other thing."

"I suppose the marriage date will be fixed at last," continued the Prince.

"It ought to be," said the Lady Agnes, with admirable self-possession. "It has hung fire long enough."

"It is to be hoped they will get on amicably. There have been so many Court scandals lately, that one feels alarmed."

"It will be the beginning of a new era—for him."

"That sounds rather funny. Era of what?"

"Oh! everything—all the domestic virtues."

"Poor Victor! I can't fancy him in leading strings; and she is the sort of wife who would expect fidelity, and never appreciate it."

## PRINCE CHARMING

"Well, that is very like a wife."

"But is Victor very like that sort of husband?"

"You have not seen the best side of him, sir," answered Lady Agnes.

"Have you?"

"Perhaps; or I guess at its existence. What chance does the world give us to do anything else."

"I wish you would guess at the existence of *my* feelings," he said softly. "But you only ignore them."

"Did Princess Stéphanie?" she asked.

"My reticence and her tact saved the situation."

Lady Agnes laughed. "All the world knows your character for inconstancy," she said. "Why—where is the Count?"

"The Princess beckoned to him. He has joined her. Probably they will compare notes as to a delayed correspondence, with marginal references to 'Caledonia stern and wild'."

"Erinia will serve as well," said the Lady Agnes. "It is wild enough, God knows, and unlike enough to the civilised playground of globe-trotters. I think I have never longed so much for anything as to hear our friend's experiences and opinions of his newly discovered subjects."

## PRINCE CHARMING

"You will make the Princess jealous if your topic of common interest develops into confidence."

The Lady Agnes glanced at the group standing and sitting under the trees. An odd little smile touched her lips. "She will have nothing to fear from me," she said coldly.

"I wish I had—not," said Prince Harold.

"And so you won't go to the station?" she observed irrelevantly.

"No. And I leave to-night. It would be perplexing to have the two Dromios on the scene at the same moment. I would stay if you wished it, but you don't?"

"I am indifferent as to either course."

"You are very cruel. I could almost find it in my heart to wish you equally bad treatment."

"Don't," she said, gravely. "I assure you I don't deserve it. Perhaps my pity for you makes me ——"

"Cruel, to be kind? That is poor consolation. Pity is not the diet on which love can flourish."

"We are drifting into foolishness, and I am in too good temper to have my morning spoilt."

The Prince hit a little stone with his stick somewhat viciously.

"I'm glad I am leaving this place," he said.

"That is very rude," she answered laughing.



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"Though I feel compelled to say there was no necessity for you to remain. All the *dramatis personæ* know about you, and we couldn't get up the shadow of a romance with the Princess. By all rules of novelists and play-wrights she ought to have fallen in love with you, and the royal *fiancé* should have returned in a magnanimous mood to comfort your broken hearts, and resign his claim. Instead of which she has remained obstinately true to her plighted troth and not even attempted the ghost of a flirtation."

"Everyone is not such an adept at breaking hearts as yourself."

"Are there such things as broken hearts? I thought they went out with Miss Edgeworth's novels, and short waisted frocks—and curls. The long ringletty things, you know, one sees in the Cooks of Beauty."

"I was speaking of men. I don't believe women ever *do* suffer. Their vanity may be hurt, or their pride. Their hearts never."

She laughed again. His ear was not keen enough to detect a false ring in the mirth.

"Oh! of course we have no such things," she said. "We learn their inconvenience before we make our first bow to Society. If you want the real brittle

## PRINCE CHARMING

palpitaters you must go to diary-maids, and the 'Tale-of-mean-streets' sort of people. I suppose they feel. At least the realist novel writer says so. No doubt he buys his experience at their hands. In society no one is so unwise as to permit emotion to supply the place of indifference."

"You *must* feel sometimes though," said Prince Harold. "I defy any woman to go through life without caring for some man, and suffering for it."

"That is what I have done my best to avoid," said Lady Agnes. "The caring may be possible, but the suffering is ridiculous. I was never ridiculous."

"It might have been better for you," he said.

"We never do, or like, or cultivate what is best for us. That is what affords the novelists and propagandists such a happy life. They can always hold us up as examples, and they dearly love an example. It is almost as good as a convert."

"I wish," he said earnestly, "that I could persuade you it would be very much better for you to have someone to love you, care for you, protect you. You will not always be young, though no doubt your charm will far outlast your years. You will not always find your sole content in a restless, frivolous, incessant round of social duties, and pleasures. Your mind is too cultured, and your critical faculties too

## PRINCE CHARMING

keen for anything paltry to content you. Why can you not make up your mind to accept my love, my caré, my devotion? You have tried them—and me—long enough to prove they *do* exist.”

“I do not doubt their existence,” she said, softly. “But they do not touch me. I am sorry, I wish I could feel as . . . as you do, but I can’t. I know it.”

“You will not allow yourself to feel. It is the pride of your cult—and the crime! You have analyzed and dissected yourselves until there is no genuine emotion possible.”

“Perhaps you are right. But life is much more comfortable without emotions. Besides I never could see why we must depend upon one special individual to make ‘*La pluie et le beau temps*’ of life for us. There is something narrow-minded in circumscribing one’s limits to a single love, or faith, or friendship.”

“You certainly will never do *that*,” he said, bitterly.

“I don’t like to be influenced. It rouses antagonism in my nature.”

“All the same you have been influenced, and you know it,” he said meaningly.

“I am going back to speak to the Princess,” she said suddenly. “Pray continue your walk.”

## CHAPTER XVII

THE evening was nearly over. The Prince Victor had been received, welcomed, *fêted*. He had travelled incognito as usual, but every one knew the meaning of that incognito. The Counsellor had received him at the station with a small crowd of lesser personalities, among whom the Lady Agnes was not.

She received him alone in her own salon for a few moments before dinner.

The first glance at his face told her of a change; a change that struck cold as fear to her heart. In all the years of their intimacy and friendship she had never seen that look. She knew why—at last.

"Did you find the island all you expected, sir?" she asked, when she had greeted him with unnecessary formality.

"Somewhat more," he said. "You observe my health has improved, and my figure—" He paused meaningly.

## PRINCE CHARMING

"It is wonderful," she said. "The cure has exceeded all our expectations. You stayed at the Convent, of course?"

"Yes. There was no other place. The good sisters sang your praises loudly."

"You must have found it—dull?"

"Perhaps that was why I liked it," he answered. "All my life before had been an effort to evade dullness. I have discovered that bores and boredom are of our own making."

"You saw the funny old man who thinks he is king of the island, I suppose? A sort of harmless lunatic."

"He entertained me very often," said the Prince gravely. He walked over to the window and stood looking out at the lighted street below the Hotel, the glittering lights of the Kursaal.

"There was a girl, a grand-daughter?" continued the Lady Agnes. "A pretty barefooted child who made an excellent guide. She knew every inch of the island, and every legend and story of the country. Did you see her?"

"Yes. She made, as you say—an excellent—guide."

The cold, even tones struck on his questioner's ear with a sense of strangeness. His manner too had

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acquired unusual reserve. He and she were meeting on new ground, and yet, could three weeks in semi-barbarous Erinia have wrought such a change?

“You seemed to have forgotten us entirely,” she said presently. “Count Fritz was growing uneasy.”

“Was he?” said the Prince absently. “Yes, I didn’t want to disturb my holiday.”

“I suppose you found the people very odd and quite different from the rest of your subjects?”

“Some,” he said, “were capable of improvement. Some, could have taught us a lesson in courtesy, kindness, and generosity.”

“And bombast?” she questioned significantly.

He thought of the Patriot. His brow darkened. “Is our nation—are we individually—so free from errors that we can afford to condemn others? The faults of Erinia spring from misjudged qualities—qualities fine, and generous, and noble. The people, as a people, have been neglected, and ignored. If natural jealousy has bred crime, and crime anarchy and confusion, the fault is that of the rulers, not the ruled, or misruled.”

“I see your Highness has not wasted opportunities,” said the Lady Agnes significantly. “Yet, the island afforded very limited scope. But perhaps your studies were not confined solely to those limits?”

## PRINCE CHARMING

"I saw—other places," he answered. Then he turned from the window, and looked at her and wondered if there had been a little feminine spite in that observation about the "excellent guide?" His wonderful Princess, the girl half fairy, and half woman, with her starry eyes and her radiant smile, was it possible that to this fair cultured woman of his world, she had only seemed what those words labelled her?

"Mountains, seas, towns, people," he went on hurriedly. "I for once enjoyed the change of meeting other men as equals; of seeing myself relegated to a quite unimportant background in company. Erinian company."

She laughed. "Was the sensation agreeable?"

"Yes. It taught me my own value apart from a false importance."

"I think," she said, "that your value might be easily separated from what you call 'false importance' and yet, not suffer by the severance."

"Ah! Agnes," he answered sadly. "You have always flattered and spoilt me, so have most of my friends. It was unwise. I have learnt many startling truths lately, but none more surprising than my own insignificance weighed as my only natural prerogative. I have nourished an idea that my influence

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was as strong as my position. It is an exaggerated idea. I would not quarrel with any one who held my place."

"But, sir," she said in surprise. "This is very strange."

"Life is very strange, Agnes," he said, and a shadow stole into his dark blue eyes and dimmed their brightness. "Its significance only touches us when we cease to be puppets, and stand on our own rights."

"As man to man, or man to woman?" she asked meaningly.

"Both," he said; and the shadow was still on his face as he offered his arm to take her in to dinner.

The Princess Stéphanie was to receive him after dinner in her own suite of rooms. Perhaps the thought of that ordeal affected his appetite, or—his spirits. He ate sparingly, he drank less, he was grave, almost reticent. The Counsellor was bewildered, the Lady Agnes alarmed, the lesser constellations full of concern. Usually he was such good company, and they had expected untold amusement from his descriptions of Erinia. But he scarcely spoke of his travels.

For his own part, it seemed as if a lifetime had intervened between his last appearance in this



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frivolous cultured crowd, and the present return to it.

He was out of touch with gossip, and talk, and inuendo; the pretty things, the spicy things, the *bon mots* and epigrams that made the salt of conversation. They frothed and bubbled about his ears as of yore, but he, who had been used to say he could stand a bad dinner but not a dull one, was alone pre-occupied and serious.

The Lady Agnes grew more and more preplexed. "He has met someone who has altered him," she thought. "And for once he has not been candid with me."

Yet she could think of no single person on the island who would have had influence or attraction sufficient to occasion this change. Perhaps he had not been at Crooknagoora all the time. Perhaps in one of the towns—

She recalled the names of titled beauties in Erinia's capital. There were several whose loveliness and wit had signalled them out for special mention in Court Journals, and Society newspapers. But to meet them he would have required to drop his incognito. And he had never done that, so Count Fritz had told her.

As she tossed the ball of witty nothings to and fro

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her eyes were always on that grave face. She acknowledged that the gravity became it. Indeed the alteration in the Prince's whole appearance struck everyone.

He had lost flesh and gained muscle. Three weeks of a simple natural life, exercise, fresh air and spare diet had worked wonders. But in his face the change was more evident.

His expression wore a new kingliness—that of self-conquest. The sadness in his eyes was the softness of regret, not dissatisfaction.

"He has beaten Harold—at last," thought Lady Agnes. "He has gained the one thing necessary to make his face what the Court photographers called it—*le plus beau Prince* of his time. I wonder if he will tell me?" she reflected. "He has been used to tell me everything so long—escapades, follies, worries, weakness. What has happened at last to make him reticent? His very smile is absent; it comes, but there is no mirth in it. Habit rules him—not enjoyment."

The Lady Agnes had always prided herself on her accuracy in reading character. It was a study that interested her. But she knew that no one ever succeeds in reading it as a whole. Chance glimpses of the real person, a flash of truth, a lifting of the mask, that is all.

## PRINCE CHARMING,

To-night the Prince kept the mask on with a rigorous hand. She caught no glimpse of the real face behind. But never had he seemed so interesting to her. Never so worthy of a woman's love, a woman's admiration. For once she envied the Princess Stéphanie awaiting her royal *fiancé* in that suite beyond. For once she coveted an invitation hitherto undesired. She would have given anything to see them meet, to hear what was said.

Her face burned as the ignoble thought crept into her heart. But it was a woman's heart despite all that the world and her set had tried to make of it, and it had held but one idolatry.

The Prince rose at last, and the circle scattered and dispersed to its own individual amusements. The Lady Agnes bent before him as he passed out of the room.

"Wish me luck in my wooing," he said, with an odd smile. But for once she had no light word with which to answer.

The Princess Stéphanie sat by the open window of her *salon*, and the Grand Duchess of Stromberg was busy over some useful knitting within appreciable limits.

The Princess was pretty enough as a woman to

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be considered lovely as a Princess. She was dark, and stately of carriage. She had a head for a tiara, and a bust for diamonds. Her eyes were hazel, with a clear golden light round the pupils and rendered fascinating by long curling lashes. Her complexion was not so perfect as that of the Lady Agnes; it showed change of emotion and feeling with alarming candour. At present it owned a warmth and ruddiness of true Teutonic blood. She was really embarrassed and uneasy, but the severe tutoring of Court governesses helped her to conceal anything so undignified.

The folding doors were thrown open, and the Prince announced by his full titles. As he crossed the room and bowed before his promised bride, a strange chill and calm stole over him. His lips touched the hand extended to him; it would be hard to say which was the coldest, lips or trembling hand. For the Princess was young, and as much in love as a well brought up Princess could be, with a man whom she had only met once, but whose picture had never left her since its first introduction as that of a possible Consort.

"I regret I was not here to welcome your arrival," he murmured courteously. "But I had received no intimation."

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"It was all those stupid newspapers," interposed the Grand Duchess. "We were on our way to Ischl; Stéphanie had been ordered the waters. We took this *en route*, as we heard you were here. I suggested, doing so."

"And Harold met you?" asked the Prince.

"Yes. Of course we saw then how the mistake had occurred."

"Will you not be seated," said the Princess.

He took a chair by the window. There was an appreciable distance between them.

From under her long lashes she studied his face, and read many changes since their last interview.

"You have been travelling, have you not?" she enquired.

"I have been visiting a long neglected part of my dominions," he answered. "Making acquaintance with subjects comparatively strange."

"You look thinner, paler than when I last saw you. I trust you have not been ill?"

"Never better," he said smiling. "And you? I trust there is no serious reason for your physicians sending you to Ischl?"

"Stéphanie has not been strong," said the Grand Duchess meaningly. "She is too studious, reads and thinks too much, takes too little exercise. I do not

## PRINCE CHARMING

hold with modern forms of it, but I believe that cycling—in moderation——”

• “It is excellent,” said the Prince. “My sisters tell me so. If England all the women do it.”

“Oh!” said the Grand Duchess bridling, “I was not aware it had become common. Really the —other—classes are so very imitative it is quite difficult to be exclusive in any way.”

“In the way of amusement certainly,” said the Prince.

He then made formal inquiries as to the health and welfare of his future parents-in-law. The Princess answered them with equal formality.

• She had given the Grand Duchess a hint beforehand, but the good lady seemed to have forgotten it. She clicked her needles industriously, and mentioned many items of personal and general gossip which she considered interesting. The conversation was not brilliant. The Princess felt embarrassed, and the Prince looked longingly out at the illuminated gardens, and the quaint *allée* bordered by tall pines.

Unconsciously he sighed. The Princess heard and looked quickly at his averted face. If they had only been alone, if she had only been an ordinary girl, not a Princess!

Involuntarily she echoed the sigh.

## PRINCE CHARMING

The Prince turned his head, met her glance, and remembered.

"Would you like to come out on the balcony?" he enquired.

Their windows opened on the balcony. They could hear the music from the Kursaal, watch the crowds, yet remain unseen. She rose at once.

"Oh! yes," she said. "No, do not ask 'Aunt Augusta . . . she suffers from rheumatism."

He bowed and stood aside. She stepped out, and took one of the chairs. Great tubs of flowers stood about, their scent filled the air. The golden globe of a full September moon hung lamp-like in the dusk above.

With a sudden heart-pang his thoughts flew back to an Erinian dusk, the flash of silver on a blue sea, the tender thrilling tones of a girl's voice.

Some thorns of a "Sorrow's crown of sorrows" pierced his brow at that moment.

It had been easy enough in years gone by to make love, to whisper compliments to any pretty woman. And the Princess was pretty; strangely, wistfully so in this becoming light. But to him she was only an embodied duty. The thought that she must listen, and he must speak, robbed him of any sort of eloquence. He—the silver-tongued Prince Charming.

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—whom no woman had ever been able to resist, was for once dumb, cold, almost stupid.

He racked his brain for something to say. He wished she would take the initiative. But she was equally embarrassed, and equally uncomfortable.

For the first time it struck her that she ought not to have agreed to her aunt's suggestion. That it was the Prince's place to have sought her. That perhaps he was displeased to find her here.

"We are going on to Ischel to-morrow," she said formally.

He started. "So soon? I had hoped you would have made some longer stay here. It would have given us an opportunity of becoming better acquainted."

"We certainly do not know very much of one another," she said somewhat wistfully. "I think it a little unfortunate—our position. We are going to take a serious step, and etiquette forbids any true knowledge of our own feelings in the matter."

"It is—a serious step," he answered, "For no one can love or like to order."

"And to do either, one must have some acquaintance as a basis of friendship—or dislike."

"Dislike!" he said quickly. "Oh! I hope there has been no question of *that*. I assure you—"



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She laid her hand lightly on his arm. "You must not think me bold," she said. "But I want to speak frankly. Marriage means so much more to a woman than a man. If you have any reason why you would rather *not*—"

She paused. The little break in her voice, the quiver of her lips was infinitely pathetic.

The Prince groaned in spirit. Had she been cold, proud, repellant, his task would have been so much the easier. On the wings of the soft night air a faint perfume stole towards him. His heart seemed to stand still. Jasmine, was it not? How came jasmine here of all places. Why would it not stay in an island over the sea, climbing round the porch of a little Irish cabin?

With a strong effort he controlled himself. "It is a hard fact," he said, "that romance is not for us around whom nations build hopes, and Courts weave policies. But I assure you I fully esteem the honour of your promise. I will do my utmost to make you happy."

"It is such a pity," she said softly, "that we can't meet and make acquaintance just like ordinary people; that there must be so much reserve, and strangeness—beforehand."

"It is the obligation of our position," he said

## PRINCE CHARMING

bitterly. "Do not fancy you are alone in the feeling."

"You look so kind," she murmured. "Everyone says you are. And I—I feel as if I could trust you. I felt it from the first. Perhaps you think I am doing—this—for ambition or policy, or because others wish it, but I assure you—"

He pitied her embarrassment, and took her hand. It still trembled. It was still cold.

"Do not assure me of anything," he said, "except that you are good enough to offer to put up with me from motives I appreciate, but do not deserve. I shall be honestly glad if you will marry me. I have no right to question your feelings on the matter, but if they counselled withdrawal—"

"Oh! No, no!" she said hurriedly. "Surely I expressed myself badly."

"Then things remain as they were. Ah! Princess—"

"No. Not *that* any longer."

"Stéphanie, then," but his voice lacked the music that had overflowed in another name. A simpler, sweeter name that lay buried in his heart beside a tiny spray of shamrock.

"My fairy love!" he whispered to the jasmine and the stars.

## PRINCE CHARMING

The girl beside him started.

"Oh!" she said, "it's not possible. You—you also care? I was so afraid. It seemed impossible—"

He laughed. There was mockery in the laughter. Something worse too—madness, bitterness, irony.

"Why should it be impossible? Are you not fair, young, virtuous, charming? And I am only a man."

"Ah! that is much better," she cried softly. "A man can tell a woman that he loves her."

"And cannot a Prince?"

"He has not done so—yet," she murmured, with pretty coquetry.

The chair against which the Prince leant, fell suddenly to the floor with a crash. The Grand Duchess awoke from nodding over her knitting.

She rushed to the window.

Princess Stéphanie had been well brought up. But even well brought up princesses can smother a naughty little word between rebellious lips—on occasions.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THE Prince picked up the fallen chair. It had saved the situation. There was no possibility of renewing the *tête à tête*.

Presently they all adjourned to the Kursaal, where the Grand Duchess played cards in a room set apart for high and serene personages, and the Prince was surrounded by his special friends.

Princess Stéphanie was in radiant spirits. Everyone noticed it, and bets were exchanged as to the date of the next royal wedding. The Prince was always by her side. But he skilfully evaded any chance of their being alone for a single moment. "It is too soon," he told himself. "I cannot school my lips to lie so quickly. *That* name will break from them, that memory shame me. Thank God she goes to-morrow!"

And he kept her near those who could talk and

## PRINCE CHARMING

jest, sometimes leading the laughter himself; but a touch of bitterness lay behind it always, and one among the gay crowd never missed the false note, but took jest and quip for what they were worth.

The cover of some secret grief, an effort at forgetfulness.

She tested this colour of mind with her usual skill. In some day to come she resolved to find out its cause.

Once—chance left her by the side of the Princess for a few moments. “Is your Highness still bent on trying the waters of Ischl?” she asked meaningly.

A faint shadow swept over the girlish face.

“I fear we must go to-morrow,” she said. “We have already outstayed our time here. And my aunt loves Ischl.”

“There will be dancing presently,” continued the Lady Agnes. “The Prince has secured the ball-room for his party, and part of the band has been told off to play. Does your Highness intend to honour us?”

“Oh! I love dancing,” she cried ecstatically. Then a remembrance of etiquette crushed back her enthusiasm. “I am afraid my aunt will not permit it,” she faltered. “And the Prince has said nothing to me. He evidently did not expect—”

“The Prince is of course only Count Christian

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here," observed Lady Agnes. "It is almost a pity *your* title is so well known."

• "Aunt Augusta always insists upon it," said the Princess mournfully. "It certainly has—disadvantages. He waltzes beautifully, does he not?" she added, with a wistful glance at the figure of her illustrious *fiancé*.

• "Divinely," said the Lady Agnes. "He is considered the best dancer of any of our royalties."

The Princess's eyes grew still more wistful. Those of Lady Agnes were a little contemptuous. But then she had no sympathy with people who showed any sort of feeling. Besides, the Prince had already engaged her for their usual three waltzes. Their steps suited so admirably.

• "The Grand Duchess is rising from the tables," continued Lady Agnes, somewhat cruelly. "She never plays after midnight, does she?"

• "No," answered the royal niece. "She told me she would go to bed early to-night on account of the journey to-morrow."

Lady Agnes regarded her with something approaching pity. Poor little girl! After all what was the use of being a Princess if one had to go to bed when one was ordered, and could not dance at a *Kursaal*, or talk nonsense, or enjoy oneself, or do

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any of the hundred and one natural and foolish and harmful things that the rest of the world did.'

"The loss will be ours," she said in answer to that last mournful remark. She saw that the Grand Duchess was speaking to her future nephew-in-law, and knew she must be enquiring for Stéphanie.

"Ah! I shall have to go," exclaimed that unfortunate Princess. "I see Victor is coming for me."

The colour warmed in her cheek. She took his arm, and wished the Lady Agnes good-night. For a few blissful moments more they were together as he accompanied them to the hotel. Then he bowed, and uttered the usual graceful courtesies so familiar to him.

"I shall have the honour of waiting on you to-morrow," he said to the Grand Duchess.

"We leave very early," she exclaimed.

"I will be at the station," he made answer, and the Princess's heart sank, and she felt as much inclined to cry as any ordinary girl who is very much in love, and very uncertain as to how much she is beloved in return.

She followed the Grand Duchess, who was yawning vigorously. Away, opposite, in those lighted rooms, the band was playing the *Invitation à la Valse*. Soon he would be whirling some other favoured

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woman to seductive strains of Strauss or Waldteufel, while she would be in the hands of her maid, in the ignominious position of a child too young to mingle with the gaieties, or conversation of its elders.

Certainly life was very hard on serene and well-born Princesses. It would almost be better to be a more ordinary, well-dollared, American girl!

In the ball-room the Prince danced with the Lady Agnes. She was in brilliant spirits. No woman there could rival her, and the Prince was "off duty," and her own once more.

"Your dancing is as perfect as ever," he said, as they floated round and round the room, with that buoyancy and abandonment born of much practice and perfect suitability.

"I am certainly happy," she answered. "May I congratulate your Highness on your decision? I trust it will not be long before we welcome the Princess Stéphanie as Princess—Charming?"

"Ah!" he said sharply. "It was you I remember who called me that—to her."

"To—her?" interrogated his partner. "I think not, sir. I have had very little conversation with Her Serene Highness, but to the best of my recollection I observed the etiquette of both Courts on



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those occasions, and relegated my own privileges to the background."

"Of course," he said hastily, "I mistook. I meant—someone else. Yes, Agnes, it is all settled, our part of it. The rest will no doubt be speedily arranged."

"She is very charming," said Lady Agnes. "And very much in love with you," she added. "That—is not always the rule in a royal alliance. Still, if love does appear on the scene, it is an advantage to know it is on the lady's side."

"I think its entire absence would be better," he answered. "Friendship and suitability are a better basis. More trustworthy."

"It's a pity to analyze one's feelings," she said. "And not always safe. You should be well content, sir."

"Who said I was not?" he asked, as he paused and drew her a little aside from the rest.

Her eyes swept his face. How she loved its every line and look. Yet he had never guessed it.

"Happiness is implied by so many trivial things," she said lightly—"that its existence is unconsciously apparent. You, sir, seem indifferent to trifles."

"How I shall miss you, Agnes!" he exclaimed suddenly.

Her heart seemed to stand still. "Your Highness

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knows where to find me," she said very low. "Marriage need not surely alter our long friendship."

"No, I hope not. But nothing is quite the same when a position or phase of life is altered for us. We promise ourselves there shall be no change, but there always is."

"Did you begin to make that discovery to-night, or three weeks ago?" she asked.

"Three weeks?" he echoed.

"Three weeks of separation—and silence."

"It seems longer than that," he answered absently. "I . . . it was a strange experience."

"It must have been," she said dryly. "For it has brought you back almost a stranger."

"Some day," he said, "I may tell you of it. Not now; not for long, perhaps."

"An experience," she said, "is the term we apply to the discovery of something in ourselves that has been unexpectedly called upon to take an active part in life. In all Erinia, as I know it, I can picture nothing that would produce such a feeling in you."

"Perhaps not," he answered calmly. "It would not have appealed to you in quite the same way. Shall we continue our valse?"

"The Princess was very much disappointed that

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you did not invite her to dance," remarked Lady Agnes presently.

"It never occurred to me. Besides her aunt—"

"Yes. We both agreed as to the obstacle. But that did not efface the disappointment."

"I should not have imagined she cared," he answered indifferently.

"What did I say to you, sir, a moment ago, about trifles."

"You are too clever for me to-night, Agnes, or I am tired."

Indeed he looked it for a moment, as he paused again, though her feet betrayed unwillingness.

"You travelled here very quickly?" she said.

"Yes. It was better to get this matter arranged. It has been hanging fire long enough."

"Then you had quite made up your mind when you came here?"

"Before that," he answered.

"Yet there was a good deal of indecision when you departed for Erinia?"

"Perhaps. It was as well to avoid its recurrence."

"Do you know, sir," she said. "You are very much changed. I seem to be making a new acquaintance."

He laughed harshly.

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"Why did you send me to Erinia?" he suddenly asked.

"It was your own desire to go."

"Ah! so it was, so it was."

"And is that visit responsible for my new acquaintance?"

"I have been nowhere else," he replied.

"And you only stayed at the convent?"

"That is so."

"It sounds a little enigmatical. If you were anyone else I should suspect a flirtation. But I believe you have a soul above fisher girls."

"I have been your faithful friend and adorer for—how long, Agnes?"

"We need not count the years to a day. Long enough to tire of me, let us say."

"And marry, and settle down, and be—unhappy ever after. It is the fate of kings and princes."

"It will be your own fault if you are unhappy. The Princess is not at all exacting, and has all the simplicity and sentiment peculiar to her countrywomen."

She was talking at random. She felt as if her powers of sensation had been suddenly chilled. What *had* happened on that island? Something that she would and must discover at all costs. Why did he

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keep her off? Why build up a barrier of reserve? Had she not been the recipient of his confidences and escapades long enough to prove her sincerity.

"No. There will not be the least necessity for unhappiness," she went on, "unless you are bent on resurrecting some '*grande passion*,' or finding one. Otherwise—nothing need matter. If you come to think of it, nothing really *does* matter unless we choose to think so. We make our own troubles."

"Not always," he said.

She felt a sudden impulse of anger.

"Always and entirely!" she exclaimed. "We need not love or hate, or do foolish things, or go to wrong places, or *stay* where anything unpleasant threatens to occur, unless we neglect a warning given to our hearts. If we hear it and don't attend, then we have only ourselves to blame."

"Perhaps you are right," he said, watching the whirling figures with sudden weariness. "I had my warning once. I closed my ears to it. But it is not for myself I care. A man should be strong enough to suffer for his faults. It is only when you see another—"

"So there is another," she said quickly. "This passionless serene piece of humanity that has usurped your place owed me at least an explanation. Ah!

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sir, have I read your unspoken thoughts so long, to be baffled now?"

• The little jealous flash of rage startled him.

"*Et tu, Brute?*" sounded in his ears. If Agnes could thus turn and rend him, what would the others of his world say once they knew of his folly.

"I knew I could not deceive you, Agnes," he said. "But you must not blame me. I am not a sinner this time, or a fool. I have only learnt a lesson that I much needed. I have looked on another side of life. It has made me a little discontented—a little ashamed."

• "Ashamed—!" she said. "You?"

• "It is about time, don't you think so? Ah! Agnes, my ears have been dulled by flattery long enough. It was right I should see life as it is. Men and women, not puppets of fashion. True worth and honour, not their counterfeit."

She looked up. He saw emotion in her eyes, and a great wonder.

"Is it the Prince, really, who speaks?" she said, under her breath.

The rhythm of the waltz rolled by unheeded. Neither of them remembered why they were not dancing.

"Something has changed you," she went on.

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"You sent me," he said, "where no divinity hedged me. I saw myself in other eyes. I have not yet recovered the shock."

"Will you ever tell me the truth about it?" she asked.

"Some confidences are too precious to share with any other soul; some too humiliating. But if I should change my mind, Agnes—"

"Yes?"

A look that she had never seen in his eyes stole into them in that pause. The music softened, slackened, died. Many glances turned to where they stood in such strange forgetfulness.

Suddenly he roused himself, and offered his arm to conduct her to a seat.

"You did not finish your sentence, sir," she said.

"No. I meant to say if I change into that old acquaintance again, ask me to tell you what I refused to-night. But ask when the seventeenth of March comes round."

"The seventeenth of March?" she echoed wonderingly.

"It is Saint Patrick's Day," he said, "and Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Erinia!"

## CHAPTER XIX

THE Lady Agnes left the ball-room early. She pleaded indisposition. It did not surprise people that the Prince also retired from the gay scene soon after her departure.

Then tongues were loosened, and the forthcoming marriage and the long friendship were discussed on all sides.

"But he is greatly altered," they said, and Count Fritz agreed. For no one was more puzzled at the alteration than himself.

"It is quite time he was married," he said, to a sprightly dame of the Court who was going on to Homburg, but had stayed here *en route*, to make Princess Stéphanie's acquaintance.

"Quite," she agreed. "It will define the situation."

He laughed. "You mean— Oh! she's too clever for that. I expect she will marry Harold."



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"It is what he desires, but not what she deserves," said the Countess, who had no great affection for the Lady Agnes, being indeed one of a dozen "dearest friends" who envied her with all their hearts, and emulated her by aid of their maids.

"Well, a wedding will wake us all up. Heaven knows we were dull enough this season!" said the Counsellor.

"But I confess I am puzzled at the change in him. Did you remark it?"

"He was a little quieter: *distrain*, indifferent. Perhaps the Princess's influence overshadowed him."

"Oh! I don't believe *that*. It is too early in the day for influence. Besides I am sure he will always go his own way. He has had excellent examples, you know."

"The Princess looked quite radiant. I should not be surprised if they stayed on. This is an unusual opportunity for betrothed couples."

"Oh! she won't be allowed to stay. The old aunt is determined to leave to-morrow. Perhaps he will follow them?"

"Poor Homburg," said the Counsellor. "When I asked him if he intended going there, what do you think he said?"

"I can't give a guess at his answers to anything—to-night."

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"Well, he said 'Homburg be——'"

"Nonsense," said the lady smiling.

"Indeed, yes. I am puzzled as I said before.

"He used to adore Homburg."

"Of course. All sensible people do. Still if he is going to be married—"

"Exactly. The wild oats must have decent burial. But this is a phase. It won't last."

"I don't see how it can. But it must be eminently satisfactory to the Grand Duchess and the Princess. She is absurdly *ephris*."

"They say she fell in love with his photograph."

"He looked a thousand times handsomer than the photograph to-night."

"When he was talking to Lady Agnes?"

"No. When he forgot there was anyone to talk to."

"That is another curious trait about him—absence of mind."

"He has many things to concern him. This threatened war."

"He never troubled about such things before. Don't you know he nicknamed monarchy the Lay Figure of patriotic mismanagement."

"He has said many good things."

"And done many—unwise ones."

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"That may be the fault of heredity. Destiny often hands down a family ticket as well as travelling expenses."

Then they wished each other good-night, and retired with a pleasurable sense of not knowing what the next day would bring forth, such as the routine of a Court rarely afforded.

The Prince dutifully attended his promised bride to the station. He had become an important factor in an embarrassing situation, and the criticism of many eyes judged his modes of action. With the departure of the train a sense of relief took some of duty's load off his mind, but the necessity for diplomatic regret forbade any outward display.

There were plenty comforters at hand to offer distraction had he needed them. To show a philosophic indifference he went for a solitary ride through the forest, lunched at a little chalet of quite ordinary fare, and heard a great deal of comment and speculation with regard to the gay and well-born company at present congregated at Bad Friedrichstrom. The rumoured alliance between Princess Stéphanie and an English Prince was frankly discussed by the good Frau and her round-faced, flaxen-haired daughter. He listened smiling inwardly at the frankness. It

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struck him that Haroun-al-Raschid must have got a good deal of amusement out of those undress visits to his subjects. But the hours hung heavily, and he rode back feeling that the burden had resumed its weight, that there is something stronger than one's own will, that the faculty of enjoyment is as much a "gift of the gods" as any other.

Custom drove him to the side of the Lady Agnes. They had afternoon tea on the balcony overlooking the pine-woods and the Friedrich Allée. The Counsellor was present, and the English countess who had discoursed so frankly the previous evening. There was the usual light frothy talk, the perpetual badinage, and airy nothings which made up the sum of their converse. How it had amused him once! How vapid and foolish it all seemed now.

A curious restlessness took possession of him. He wondered if it would be possible to leave this place. But equally he wondered whether any other would have attraction, occupation, relief?

The Court was absent from the Capital. Relatives and friends were alike scattered, visiting foreign royalties, or drinking at foreign Spas in a laudable endeavour to secure something in the shape of health. He had hosts of invitations to shooting parties, and deer-forests, and salmon-fishing in Scotland or Nor-

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way. To country houses where all that was witty, wicked, amusing or notorious could wile him to forgetfulness. Where his will was law, and his whims the rule of the hour. He passed them all in review, and marvelled that their attractions had departed.

"It will be harder than I thought," he said to himself.

He thought of women titled and beautiful. Women for whom even a royal passion had been excused, or only counted '*d'un chic incroyable*.' Why had they never claimed his thoughts, his heart, his allegiance as one simple loving child had done?

With a feeling of sudden terror he saw everything swept aside by one mighty wave—memory. He was sailing with Sheila over that magical sea, and the dawn was breaking rosy and golden above the mountain heights, and the angels of the day brought him their wondrous message. Ah! he had lived *then*! Lived for something holier and better than the world. Answered to a higher call, that woke his nature from the slott of selfish peace to that vague unrest which is the soul's battle-field. For there the foes to duty and honour and all the lofty possibilities of humanity lie in wait, and so long as they can blind the eyes in sleep and dull the senses to passive content, the fortunes of war are with them. But when the will awakes the real

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conflict begins. The trumpet-call, the prick of spears, these are not louder or more torturing than the perpetual discontent which destroys pleasure, and outlives excitement.

"You are pre-occupied, sir," said a voice suddenly breaking on this long thought. He started. He and the Lady Agnes were alone. The other members of the party had taken formal leave of him which he had recognized, and yet scarcely remembered.

The wave of memory swept back on a wider sea. He turned his vision away from it, sick with longing, yet resolute to endure.

"I . . . I beg your pardon, Agnes," he said hurriedly, "I was thinking."

"You have done little else since you returned, Sir," she answered. "Curiosity is pardonable, but I will keep it within bounds—if you bid me."

He smiled faintly. "Imagine," he said, "A long sleep and then the awaking in a new country, among strange inhabitants—"

"Yes?"

"The gradual accustoming oneself to think, act, speak as they do. The gradual discovery of instincts and ideas buried under the heavy pall of habit, or precedent. The gradual re-adjustment of faculties

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*and senses. It is like making an acquaintance with a new self. The operation—takes time."*

"I understand the effect, but not the cause."

"I have seen poverty cheerfully borne, hardships met without complaint. Oppression and injustice crushing out nobler virtues than our country need pride itself on possessing. I have seen all this, and heard more. Heard of fanaticism, bigotry, superstition palliating crimes of ignorance, stretching out hands blood-red with vengeance. I have come back to see what one man's wits and efforts can do to adjust the wrongs of centuries and help the needs of to-day. Does this give no excuse for pre-occupation or thought?"

"Every excuse," she said. "But behind the plea is there no personal motive? Are you working for a cause, or for an individual?"

"Perhaps—for both."

"Ah!— That explains a great deal. Even the memory of a Patron Saint. There is a place on Crooknagoora where shamrocks grow."

"I know it," he said, and she saw his cheek pale a shade.

"They carry the appeal of Erinia; have been the emblem of strife, bloodshed, faith."

"All *that*, I have been told."

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"A woman told you," she said swiftly, and for once the calm of years and culture was broken by a spasm of jealous fear.

"Yes," he said. "A woman."

He did not look at her. Perhaps it was as well. It took a moment or two to school face and feature to their usual expression.

"And for her sake you have set yourself this task?"

"For her sake I mean to honour her country's emblem," he answered.

"It will not be easy. Prejudices are not overcome in a moment."

"I never thought it would be easy. But all things must have a beginning—a very small one sometimes. Did not a tiny rodent once free a monarch of the forest?"

"You are confounding fact with fable, sir."

"The fable had a moral," he answered.

"Will your enterprise have the same?"

"Time will show. What a platitude."

"It is a foreshadowing of—other changes—perhaps."

"I suppose," he said, "they are inevitable;" and he sighed heavily. "I am no longer young, Agnes. I have forgotten it often. With you I always forgot it."

"All dreams have an end," she said bitterly.



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"That ours lasted so long is only a proof of capacity for sleep."

"At least," he said, "it was a pleasant dream, and it had no evil hour to bring regrets."

"The regret will be there—for one of us," she thought.

"Agnes," he said. "Have you ever looked on the serious side of life?—the side we once laughed at?"

"Why should I escape? I face the worst foe of my sex. A lost youth. I have nothing before me save long loveless years. What is a man's loss to *that*? When a woman reaches her meridian, and has neither husband nor child, life has no possible consolation."

"Your mirror would tell a tale more flattering than your tongue, Agnes."

"My mirror!" and she laughed. "It is not a question of lines, or grey hairs. It is not how *old* I *look*, but how old I *feel*. Time has been less cruel to me than my own heart."

"Why do you not marry Harold? His devotion is unconquerable."

"It would be a poor repayment to marry him. I possess many things that other women lack, but capacity for love is not among them. What they might owe to an alliance, I could bring. That is one all sufficient reason for rejecting so many."

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"You are the wonder of your set and sex. But surely you will marry—some day?"

"Does the idea of your own marriage bring so much happiness that you offer me an example?" she asked ironically.

"The positions are not the same. I have a duty to fulfil. You could afford a caprice."

"Not now," she said sadly. "For the years draw nigh when even a *mondaine* like myself must confess I find 'no pleasure in them.'"

He rose and stood leaning against the railings of the balcony, his eyes looking away—away—as they seemed to have a trick of doing now.

"Agnes," he said. "Would we have been happier you and I, had we been just ordinary insignificant human beings?"

"We should have learnt our relative value in the eyes of others," she answered.

"And been free agents. Free to roam the world, to make life, instead of having it made for us. To cast aside the fetters of prejudice."

"And never know the delights of power, of rule?"

"We should have been free—to love," he said.

But his eyes looked still away, further than ever, away, to that far horizon line where the sun was sinking to rest.

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She followed their glance, and knew her reign was over.

## CHAPTER XX

THERE had been a grand funeral at Crooknagoora. A funeral at which every inhabitant of the island deemed it incumbent to be present as a "follower."

A funeral at which Father M'Quade spoke a magnificent oration, and after which the Patriot got magnificently drunk.

Sheila left him in possession of the palace, and betook herself to the Convent, where the good sisters welcomed her with delight.

She had made up her mind that nothing would induce her to marry Patrick O'Farrel, and she had no resource but to throw herself on the protection of the Mother Superior. Fortunately for Sheila, the head of the Convent was not only a well educated woman, but one gifted with unusual intelligence and good judgment. She accepted the friendless girl's confidence as a mother might have done, and assured

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her of a home as long as she needed one. The girl's musical abilities made her of use in the chapel, and her skill at lace-work and embroidery would enable her to earn an independent livelihood as long as she remained there.

When the Patriot had recovered from his funereal dissipation, and learnt that Sheila had taken this step, and was determined to sell her cabin and the live stock, and become a lay sister, he was furiously angry.

He stormed the Convent ; he terrified the pious sisters ; he threatened the good Mother herself. He even spoke of invoking the law on his behalf. But nothing moved Sheila. She had determined on her future life, and neither threats nor protestations, nor all the glories of an alliance with so wealthy and patriotic a personage, could alter that determination.

Finally, in a fit of rage he betook himself to the mainland, and a week later married the buxom widow who kept the Hotel, and who speedily proved herself capable of keeping him also—in subjection.

The days dragged wearily by for the girl. They were monotonous and peaceful, but she was still too young to appreciate life's calm. She missed the duties of her former life, above all she missed its freedom. Now her every hour had its appointed task.

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Sometimes she would linger in the visitor's rooms, those rooms he had occupied, and picture him at a table, or a window. He had left one or two books behind him. They had been placed on a shelf beside those of the Lady Agnes. She touched them with reverent hands. They were in a foreign language—and therefore incomprehensible, but the fact that they were *his* gave them inestimable value. She wondered often where he was. If he had returned to his own country, or gone to that foreign land where dwelt the Princess he must wed?

There seemed no hour in any day when he was absent from her thoughts, and at night often she would lie awake praying for his happiness and his welfare, with all the ardour of her innocent loving soul.

He could not but be her hero still. There was no one to contrast with him, that could in any sense equal his charm, his courtesy, his knowledge. All he had told and taught her was enshrined in her memory. She must go through life remembering him as the brilliant, wonderful personality, who had altered the whole tenure of that life by one little word. Though reared in the simple prose of poverty, her intelligence and the romance that is part and parcel of her nation's birthright, had made

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for her an ideal mental existence. She could escape the compelling force of habit and dwell in an enchanted kingdom of her own. A kingdom that would never own but one King, even as her heart could own but one allegiance.

One day she had asked for, and been given, the task of sweeping out the two guest-rooms. They were kept in such excellent order that the labour was light enough. Yet she set every energy to work, dusting, polishing, arranging the simple furniture, draping the spotless muslin curtains, filling the quaint old china bowls with flowers from the Convent garden.

When there was nothing more to be done, she unfastened the coarse apron that covered her plain black gown, and walked over to the window and stood looking out as he must so often have looked, to where the soft clouds drifted above the distant mountain heights.

The afternoon was waning. Soon the Angelus would ring from the little belfry, and she would have to join the pious train that passed into the chapel. But for a brief half hour she was at liberty to rest here, and dream that wonderful dream of which she never tired.

A deep stillness lay around and on everything

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about this quiet retreat. A bird flitted restlessly from the boughs of a laurel tree just beyond the open window. The lowing of cattle driven home for milking, the sound of a child's voice, these alone broke the silence. She stood, leaning lightly against the window frame, the sunrays falling on her lovely russet-hued hair, the delicate outline of her face, the grace of her supple young figure.

Standing thus, and lost in thought so deep that even the opening door did not disturb it, she met the amazed and incredulous glance of a visitor who entered.

"Sheila!" said the voice of the Lady Agnes.

The girl started, turned, then her face grew warm with colour and her eyes shone with glad welcome "Oh! my Lady! is it really you? . . . I did not hear, or know—you were expected!"

They stood facing each other in the surprise of all unexpected things. The beautiful *mondaine*, and the simple girl who was ignorant as yet of any charm or grace that meant rivalry.

"I did not write," said Lady Agnes coldly. "There was no need. The Convent is a fixture and these rooms are not often tenanted. How you have grown, child—and altered."

"It is a year since you saw me," answered Sheila.



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The veins swelled in her throat, her eyes grew misty. "A great deal has happened," she went on, "in that year. I am all alone now. My grandfather is dead. I have come to live here—at the Convent."

Only one thought had been in the Lady Agnes's mind while the girl spoke. "How lovely she is . . . Great Heaven, how lovely!"

Could this be the fisher girl she had known from childish days; the girl who had worn rough sea-washed serge, and walked the island bare-footed and been shy as a stray sheep if a stranger spoke to her.

Now she was composed, graceful, beautiful as a dream. In her face was all the simplicity and strength of dawning womanhood. A soul awakened looked out from her soft and serious eyes.

"And so you live—here," she repeated mechanically. "Since when?"

"A few weeks only," said the girl. Then she sighed involuntarily. "It seems a very long time," she added.

The Lady Agnes seated herself. "Are you going to be a nun?" she asked.

"Perhaps," answered Sheila. "They say I have no vocation. It may come; the feeling I mean. At present I stay here and help the sisters in any way I can."

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"What a life," thought Lady Agnes. "And if she were seen, in London there, the world would go mad over her. How can she have grown into such beauty?"

"As you help them," she said aloud, "be good enough to bring me some tea. I am tired and thirsty. Then we will have a talk together."

"Gladly, my lady," said the girl, and throwing the coarse apron over her arm she left the room.

The Lady Agnes dropped her graceful head upon her hand, and gave herself up to reflection.

"Have I found the cause—already?" she asked herself. "It seemed too wildly impossible to credit, but I forgot the change a year can make in a girl's life. I left an unopened blossom, forgetful of sun and shower that would unclothe its petals all too quickly. . . . I must be careful though how I question her. But she is so transparent, she could not hide a secret from me."

In a few moments Sheila returned. She laid a snowy linen cloth edged with embroidery on the small table by the window. The simple service of china kept for guests, the very teapot and home-made bread looked at Lady Agnes as old friends.

"Don't go," she said, as Sheila prepared to leave the room. "I want to talk to you. Bring another cup. We will have tea together."

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Without a word that might have expressed any sense of obligation the girl went to a cupboard and brought out some more china. To one who had been companion and guest of Prince Charming, the condescension of others meant nothing !

Lady Agnes felt her wonder increase.

Even her critical faculties found nothing to blame in the way this girl ate and drank, and spoke. Natural refinement, natural dignity, set her apart from even a great lady's patronage. Sheila was just herself, and that meant something very far removed from the *gaucherie* or ignorance Lady Agnes had anticipated.

"Have you had other visitors here this summer ?" she asked languidly, as she lifted the tea-cup to her lips.

"Only one," answered Sheila. "I supposed you knew, my lady. You sent him."

She had grown very pale, but her eyes met those of Lady Agnes calmly, unflinchingly.

"Then there have been confidences," reflected that astute *mondaine*.

She smiled. "Him ? . . . How familiarly you speak of my friend, if it was my friend ?"

"It was Prince Victor of England," said Sheila quietly.

"He—told you his name ?"

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"I guessed it, my lady. You remember that picture you once showed me in an English illustrated paper? I knew him by that."

"Did any one else?"

"No—he pretended he was only a tourist. Even the sisters never suspected."

"And he allowed you to know?"

"Yes," she said.

"This is too perfectly ridiculous!" exclaimed the Lady Agnes. Her eyes flashed angrily.

"Were you much together?" she went on.

"I showed him all over the island. He used to jest about it. He humoured my grandfather's fancy and always treated him as a King."

"And you, I suppose, as a Princess?"

The tone was ironical and insolent both. The girl flushed to her temples.

"A Princess would have had no complaint to make," she said proudly.

"That assurance is very gratifying. You learnt a great deal from him in a week."

"A week?" Sheila started.

"That was all the time he spent here, was it not?"

"He spent as much time here, as he told you, my lady," she answered. Then she rose from the table.

"If you will excuse me I must go now. It is the

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hour of Vespers, and I have not asked permission to be absent."

"Oh! go, by all means," said the Lady Agnes, curtly.

"I shall be at your service—afterwards," continued the girl.

Her voice was low and troubled. After all this great lady was his friend. She had every right to question her.

"I may want you to go out with me," answered Lady Agnes. "I have a fancy for one of our old rambles. It will be light enough I suppose?"

"Oh! yes. The moon is at the full."

Her hearer looked at her with a shade less animosity. She was so young, such a child. Was it possible she could have any charm for the world-tutored, *exigeant* tastes of the Prince.

"Come to me here, when you are free," she said.

## CHAPTER XXI

THE after-glow lay warm on sea and land. A faint wind brought autumn scents upon its lingering breath; scents of ripe fruits, of dead crushed leaves and grass, of newly garnered harvest stores.

In her simple black gown Sheila walked beside the tailor-made creation which Lady Agnes had donned, as an example of expensive simplicity suited to Erinian requirements. She looked about her with a sense of strangeness. The impulse which had brought her here had been a sudden one. She had travelled night and day, and was conscious now of intense weariness. Yet that one overmastering desire to learn the secret of the Prince's visit conquered even bodily fatigue.

She had dropped the tone of superiority at first adopted. She was the old natural self familiar to Sheila in other days of brief visits to the island.

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Outside the little cabin she paused. It was deserted now. The bench stood in its old place, the wooden gate hung on a broken hinge. That sad air of desolation inseparable from untenanted habitations already stamped it.

"He died, sitting there in his chair," said Sheila gravely. "We thought he was asleep."

"We?" echoed Lady Agnes, sharply.

"O'Farrel and myself. He has come back from America. He had been here all that day. I sometimes think the shock and excitement were too much for my grandfather."

"Where were you?" asked her companion.

The memory of that day and all it had held for her swept over the girl's aching heart. Her hand clenched the bar of the gate. Oh! to think that bright face, those laughing, kindly eyes would never look over it again, giving morning greeting to his "Princess of the sea."

"I was within," she said, and a little sob caught her voice. "They had all been talking, O'Farrel and the old man and . . . your friend. When I came out my grandfather was lying back in the chair as if asleep. We could not waken him. Then I knew."

"I wonder the Prince did not tell me," said Lady Agnes.

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"He left the island at daybreak next morning. I think he could not possibly have heard."

"And what made you go into the Convent, Sheila?"

She coloured hotly. "O'Farrell wanted to marry me, but I would not consent. I hate him. He is coarse, vulgar, boastful."

"And you had had opportunities of comparing him with someone who was—none of these? I begin to understand. Let us go in a little while, and rest," added Lady Agnes abruptly.

She pushed open the gate; Sheila followed her.

"Tell me," said her questioner when they were seated, "did you ever take the Prince to the valley below—where the shamrock grows?"

"Yes, my lady." Again the girl's colour changed and her eyes grew troubled.

"He took some away with him, did he not?"

"Yes, my lady," she repeated.

"For the sake of the country and his visit, or of that one week, Sheila?" asked the interlocutor cruelly.

The girl's eyes met her own. Their secret was pitifully easy to read.

"It was three weeks," she faltered.

"Ah! I guessed as much. You poor little child. . . So you made a fairy Prince of him. You



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are not the first woman by many. He carries the fortune of his name with him wherever he goes."

Sheila was silent, but she was suffering cruelly. The searchlight of the world's criticism is a terrible ordeal for romance.

"You know, of course, he is going to be married?" continued Lady Agnes.

"He told me so. Some beautiful foreign Princess, is she not?"

"Yes," answered Lady Agnes, driving the knife home unsparingly. "Talented, clever, witty, beautiful, all that he most admires. It is not often that royal alliances promise such suitability or happiness."

Sheila's cheeks grew white as the roses above the porch. "Happiness!" Well, she had sent him back to duty. If he had won happiness also, that must be her reward.

"He deserves to be happy," she said very low.

"There are women of his world who think—otherwise," said the Lady Agnes, with a little ironical laugh. "But you—ah; *ca fait l'innocente* . . ."

"I cannot believe," said the girl, "that anyone would begrudge happiness to another."

"No, *you* would not. You see you belong to a different world altogether. And so he stayed here

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three weeks. What did he do? Were you much with him?"

"Every day," she answered.

Lady Agnes gave a little start.

"Did he never seem wearied—bored?"

"Never. He was always laughing, gay, good-humoured. He did so much too for the poor of the island. The Sisters would tell you."

"I am content with your version of his doings. Now may I ask you one question? He and I are old friends; he has no secrets from me. When I saw him again I knew that only a very strong attraction would have kept him in such a place—so long. Tell me, Sheila, did he ever make love to you?"

The angry colour flushed to the girl's temples.

"I do not understand you, my lady. If you mean did he trifle, jest, amuse himself at my expense—no. Not even you yourself, not one of those great ladies of whom you have told me, could have received greater courtesy and respect than he showed to me. I did not at first know what you meant by your questions—I know now. You think he stayed here because of me. . . I who am in your sight only a poor fisher girl, fit for the sport of an idle hour. Well, I will tell you this one thing. It did lie in my power to keep him here, away from you, away from

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his world.—from even that royal lady he has been promised to. He loved me as he loves none of you . . . as a man, be he Prince or King can only love once. And I sent him back to his duty. I who could have given him body and soul, had he wished. But I wanted him to serve my country. To help her distress, to heal her sufferings. It is nothing to me that I suffer, so long as he is honoured and beloved. I tell you this—perhaps you do not believe it, but it is true every word. He would have given me everything, but I would take nothing at his hands—for all my heart's love and worship, nothing—save one promise.”

The Lady Agnes stared at her, bewildered by the sudden passion of feeling thus let loose.

“A promise?” Her eyes swept over the slight figure shaken by this storm of emotion; over the lovely face pale now, yet ennobled by a woman's wondrous self-sacrifice. “Whatever the promise he will keep it,” she said. “I understand everything now.”

Sheila looked at her. The fire in her eyes quenched by sudden tears.

“You are his friend,” she said. “Did you credit him with less honour than the noblest soul should know? Has he been so unworthy, so untrue, so dis-

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loyal to faith hitherto, that you should expect to find here a secret that should humble him and abase me."

"I might not have believed him," said Lady Agnes.

"To some men a lie is only a debt of honour. But God's truth speaks in your voice."

For the first time in her life she felt ashamed, and ignoble. Her eyes swept Sheila's face with a slow awakening wonder. She could understand at last the charm a nature like this would have had for the Prince. A nature so different from that of other women he had seemed to love.

The wide gulf between their relative positions might only have been an incentive. Even she, world-hardened as she was, could not but appreciate the simple dignity, the innate purity of mind and soul that gave this girl a nobler heritage than mere birthright. If a pang of jealousy shot across her own heart she scorned herself for its presence. For this untutored child had done what neither herself nor any of her aristocratic sisterhood had been capable of doing—won the Prince to better things, rooted from out the garden of his soul the weeds and tares of ignoble desires, idle habits, selfish content.

"Sheila," she said, "I came here to learn the secret of a change that has filled the whole Court with wonder. What I expected I will not offend you by—

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suggesting. I can see that you have suffered; but you have won a reward for which many would not grudge suffering."

"I do suffer," said the girl brokenly. "Life will never be the same again. Never. It is different for him. He is a man, and he has the world and occupations and duties to fill his time. I—have nothing but the memory of those brief weeks. . . He was so good, all he told and taught me was so noble and true; it is no wonder I worshipped him. . . . Even you might find excuse."

"Even I—do find it," said Lady Agnes. "I can only wonder at your courage. No woman he might choose to woo has ever said him 'nay.'"

"They loved themselves best then," answered Sheila. "I—thought only of him. I would not hear him blamed, or pitied. I would not see him humiliated in the eyes of the world, even if it cost my life."

The Lady Agnes was silent. Devotion such as this shamed even her own, for she had always felt he did not love her. If he had—

She saw into this innocent candid mind; strong to suffer, strong to resist, patient under pain. And she was so young to put aside the one great glory of a woman's life.

She could find no words for once. She only sat

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on there watching the pale glory of the moonlight stealing over the hills, lighting the dusky valley where the shamrocks nestled in the soil they loved. Quaint little three-leaved plant—emblem of faith and hope and love. How well their lesson had been learnt and taught by this simple island child!

Reared amidst toilers of sea and soil, she had shown a loyalty and courage that had put to shame the cultured virtues of the world beyond. More than that she had cast the spell of her influence over a life whose good or evil deeds possessed an all-important significance in the realm that might one day call him king.

For once in her life the Lady Agnes faced a truth and acknowledged it; looked into the depths of her own soul and felt humbled. The flippant jargon of Society refused to come to her lips, the contempt and scorn with which she had come prepared to treat a mere common *liason* recoiled on herself. She recognized failure in her own life, she equally acknowledged the nobler triumph of a nobler soul. How came it that virtue, strength, and qualities capable of swaying a dynasty had no better birth-place than this poor cabin, no higher training than this little insignificant island could show?

Her thoughts carried her to and fro on a wave of

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varied emotions. She saw the world she had left behind, with its gaiety and wit and brilliance, its code of self, and its cult of cynicism and then she watched the moonlight stealing over the hill-tops to crown with its own pure halo the yet more exquisite purity of this sad young face.

"You should be canonized saint of this island, Sheila," she said suddenly breaking that long, momentous silence. "For you have chosen life-long martyrdom as your portion, in order that you 'might save a soul alive.'"

The girl started. Her eyes went from that ironic, baffling face to the star-set sky, the wide and sweeping sea.

"While there is beauty and peace on earth," she said, "one cannot always be sad—and there is always God in Heaven."

The Lady Agnes rose and held out her delicate white hand. "I wronged you in my thoughts to-night," she said. "I should be ashamed to tell you what I thought—what I could have said. Forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive. You only judged as the world judges . . . the world of which he told me . . . that did him so much harm."

"There is magic in your island, Sheila. It changed him; it has almost changed me."

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Her proud lips trembled. She was more sincere than for long years she had known herself to be.

"Let us go back to the Convent now," she said, "and pray for him."

FINIS.









